Men-at-Arms

OSPREY PUBLISHING

Roman Centurions 31 BC–AD 500

The Classical and Late Empire

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Men-at-Arms • 479

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Series editor Martin Windrow

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THE CLASSICAL AND LATE EMPIRE

INTRODUCTION

For the safety of the Emperor, the vow that I,
Lucius Maximus Gaetulicus, son of Lucius,
of the tribe Voltinia, from Vienna, made
as a new recruit in Legion XX Valeria Victrix
– to Imperial Victory, All-Divine and Most Reverend –
I have now fulfilled as chief centurion of
Legion I Italica, in the consulship of Marullus
and Aelianus, after 57 years of service

(Inscription of AD 184 from Novae in Lower Moesia – modern Bulgaria)

I wanted to hold slaughtered Dacians. I held them.
I wanted to sit on a chair of peace. I sat on it.
I wanted to take part in famous triumphs. It was done.
I wanted the full benefits of a chief centurion. I have had them.
I wanted to see naked nymphs. I saw them.

(Inscription from Africa by anonymous veteran of Trajan's Dacian Wars – AE, 1928, 27)

A fighting centurion of Legio II Augusta, from the Arc d'Orange in southern France, 29 BC or AD 21; see Plate A2 for reconstruction. (*in situ*; author's photo)

When an imperial Roman soldier signed his contract for 25 years of military service, his greatest ambition was to become a centurion – the most experienced, reliable and admired class of officers in the Roman military machine. The senior officers who commanded and staffed Roman formations were essentially non-specialists, with little or no formal training, so the army relied upon the centurions for the crucial level of command between the military tribunes and the common soldiers. In modern terms, we might characterize the legionary centurionate as a large and stratified organization of 'warrant officers', holding all appointments between platoon and battalion commands. It was these professional fighting men – sometimes with as much as 20 years' experience under their belt – who maintained day-to-day training, discipline and organization, and who provided personal tactical leadership in battle.

Many of these elite combat officers were destined to rise to more senior posts in the army, and later in the civilian administration, and in the process they transformed the social status and wealth of their

families. The serving and former senior centurions of the legions were a group enjoying considerable influence both within and beyond the armies, and on occasions members of this class were instrumental in setting up and casting down Emperors of Rome.

In this necessarily short work, following my Men-at-Arms 470 on centurions of the pre-Augustan periods, I have assembled only a selection of the many references to centurions left to us by ancient writers; my aim is to give a general idea of their place in military and civil society, of their military careers, and of their equipment. Details of their regular duties and tactical leadership are not repeated here from MAA 470, in order to leave space for other material. For the same reason I have not touched here upon the centurions of the Imperial Fleets – for which see my MAA 451, *Imperial Roman Naval Forces 31 BC–AD 500* – and only very briefly on the Late Roman officer rank of *centenarius*.

ORGANIZATION

THE EARLY PRINCIPATE

Legionary centurions

In the early 1st century AD a single legion was usually composed of 60 *centuriae*, with a complement of about 5,240 men. Three or more *centuriae* (six, according to Pseudo-Hyg., *De Mun. Castr.* I, 7, 1, 30) were formed into a *cohors*, a unit of about 240–500 men (Josephus, *BJ*, 15, 6; Pseudo-Hyg., *De Mun. Castr.* I, 2); the legion was thus divided into ten cohorts. The *centuria* was the basic sub-unit, usually of 80 *milites gregarii*, under the *centurio* (Josephus, *BJ*, I, 4,3; *hekatontarchês* in the eastern part of the empire, *BJ*, VI, 1, 8). However, Martial specifically mentions a centurion who led 100 men (*Ep.*, X, 26). Each *centuria* was further divided into ten *contubernia* – tent and messing squads.

The precedence of units and sub-units within the legion reflected the order of march or advance. The First Cohort, *cohors prima*, had twice the number of men (Pseudo-Hyg., *De Mun. Castr.* III), so it was usually 800–1,000 strong; during the 1st century AD it consisted of five, not six, double-sized *centuriae*, commanded by centurions termed collectively as *primi ordines* (thus giving the legion a total of 59 rather than 60 centurions). Within all cohorts the centurions' titles of appointment still reflected the three old troop-types of the Consular legion – the *hastati*, *principi* and *pili*. The Second to Tenth Cohorts each had six centurions, titled, from junior to senior, as the *hastatus posterior*, *hastatus prior*, *princeps posterior*, *princeps prior*, *pilus posterior*, and *pilus prior*. The number of the cohort prefixed each of these titles; e.g., the *nonus hastatus posterior*

Bronze *gorgoneion* or Medusa mask, 1st century AD, as visibly applied to the breast of the ringmail shirt worn by the centurion on the Arc d'Orange – see page 3. Originally the eyes and mouth were painted in white and red, giving it an even more striking appearance – it should be remembered that in Classical mythology, those who faced the gorgon's stare were turned to stone. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Este; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

commanded the second of the two *centuriae* of *hastati* – and was thus the most junior centurion – within the Ninth Cohort.

Within the *primi ordines* the ascending order of superiority was *hastatus posterior*, *princeps posterior*, *hastatus*, *princeps*, and *primus pilus*. These First Cohort centurions outranked all centurions of the other cohorts. The *primus pilus* ('first javelin') was the senior centurion in the whole legion (Mart., *Ep.*, I, 31; 93). He commanded the senior (front, or right-hand) *centuria* within the First Cohort, and thus that whole cohort. Only eight officers in a fully-officered legion outranked the *primus pilus*: the legate (*legatus legionis*) commanding the legion; his second-in-command, the senior tribune (*tribunus laticlavus*); the camp prefect (*praefectus castrorum*); and the five other tribunes (*tribuni angusticlavii*), who apparently served as staff officers to the legate.

A centurion's sword of Mainz type, and decorated greaves, from a lost monument in Avignon dating from the 1st century BC or 1st century AD. (Musée Calvet, Avignon; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

The term *centuriones ordinarii* (SHA, *Firm.* XIV, 2) was applied to centurions actually in command of centuries, as opposed to those detailed for detached service – e.g. on the staff of a governor, in the Praetorian Guard, or commanding independent, non-legionary units. Each centurion, however senior, had his own allocated *centuria*; this was a self-contained sub-unit, and was identified by the centurion's name. The tents of the ten *contubernia* making up a century were grouped together in the marching camp, and in permanent posts each *centuria* had its own accommodation in a barrack block – usually ten double rooms, with the century office and the centurion's living quarters at the end. Writing of Vespasian's army, Josephus (*BJ*, III, 5, 3) stated that 'their times also for sleeping and watching and rising are notified beforehand by the sound of trumpets, nor is any thing done without such a signal; and in the morning the soldiers go every one to their centurions, and these centurions to their tribunes, to salute them'.

The term *principales* indicated all men ranking between the common *milites gregarii* and the centurions – roughly, what we would call 'non-commissioned officers'. Within each *centuria* they comprised the *signifer* (standard-bearer – in the century of the *primus pilus*, the *aquilifer* or eagle-bearer); the *optio* (the centurion's second-in-command); the *cornicen* and *bucinator* (hornist and trumpeter); and the *tesserarius* (administrative assistant – what we might call the 'orderly room clerk').

Detached appointments: the *auxilia*

The non-citizen *auxilia* or auxiliary units made up approximately half of the Roman army, and were organized in infantry or mixed *cohortes* and cavalry *alae*. These separate units of *c.* 500 or *c.* 1,000 men were usually

Details from the funerary stele of L. Blattius Vetus, a centurion of Legio IIII (IV) Macedonica, dated to the end of the 1st century BC; see Plate A1. One side of the stele (left) displays his *dona militaria*, which under close examination can be identified as two *torques* and nine *phalerae*. The other side shows, protruding from behind a curved *scutum* shield, the scabbard chape of a *gladius* sword of Mainz type (centre), and the end of a *vitis* vine-staff (right). The latter is intriguingly carved in the Egyptian lotus-flower shape – this identifies Blattius as a veteran of Augustus's campaign in Egypt – and may also have been painted. Interestingly, the stele is also carved with only a single greave (*ocrea*), perhaps echoing the traditional Samnite style of wearing a greave on the left leg only. (Archaeological Museum, Este; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

commanded by a tribune or a prefect – ranks reserved for men of the superior 'equestrian' social class, which was defined by proven wealth – but they relied for the maintenance of discipline, training and tactical leadership upon centurions or decurions, who enjoyed the same status as legionary centurions. The auxiliary centurions were mainly promoted from the ranks (or, especially in the 1st–2nd centuries AD, from among *principales*) of the legions. In a minority of cases centurions and decurions were entrusted with the command of some of the auxiliary units (CIL, III, 1918, 8739, 11936, 14370 2; VII, 371), and apparently without entirely losing their connection with their parent legion (CIL, II, 4083, 4114; III, 7904; VIII, 2749). There is mention of the secondment of a centurion from Legio X Fretensis to Britain as *praepositus cohortis prima hispanorum* – Commander of the First Cohort of Spaniards; this may have been at the time of the major campaign led by the Emperor Septimius Severus (r. AD 193–122 – CIL, VII, 371). When, atypically, a centurion was transferred from a legionary appointment to a unit command in the auxiliary troops, this was no real promotion; the man performed the duties of unit commander, but his rank remained that of centurion.

In the 2nd and the first part of the 3rd century AD, centurions were also detached from their legions and assigned as *praepositi* (commanders) of more temporary independent native units (*numeri*) that we might term 'frontier scouts'. For example, many inscriptions from the North African fort of Calceus Herculis (El Kantara) relate to a centurion who was sent to command either a Numerus Palmyrenorum or, less probably, a *centuria* of Legio III Augusta stationed there (AE 1926.144–145; 1933.42; CIL VIII, 2497–2498). Another inscription mentions that during the reign of Commodus (r. AD 180–192) a police post (*burgus speculatorius*) was established for the safety of travellers at a road junction on the route between Calceus Herculis and Mesarfelta, and was commanded by a *centurio praepositus* of the Numerus Hemesenorum. (CIL, VIII, 2494–2495). At a later period centurions given some independent staff appointments may have been permanently detached from their legions (CIL, VIII, 7050).

The Praetorian Guard, *urbaniciani*, *vigiles*, and *frumentarii*

The emperors' Praetorian *cohortes* of the imperial bodyguard had their *centuriae* and *centuriones* (Suet., *Nero*, 47). The term of service in these cohorts was 16 years, and on completion of this period the most efficient soldiers were invited to continue their service indefinitely, with increased pay and rank, as *evocati*. This was a regular status, giving access to a range of possible employments; many – though not all – *evocati* were either ex-centurions, or would later be promoted to that rank.

Originally Rome had three *cohortes urbanae* of city guards, each cohort being commanded by one tribune and six centurions. In the time of the Flavians this was increased to four cohorts, each with about 500 men. Seven cohorts of *vigiles* were raised in AD 6, with policing and fire-watching duties. These were under the control of the *praefectus vigilum*, each having one tribune, a *princeps*, and seven more junior centurions.

Detail of the helmet carved on the funerary monument to an unidentified late 1st-century BC centurion; the stone was re-used in about AD 1000 during the building of a church at Megliadino San Fidenzio. The crest running from front to back is probably of ostrich or peacock feathers, like those carved more clearly on a centurion's helmet on the contemporaneous mausoleum of the Julii at Glanum (Saint-Remy – see MAA 470, page 18). Other faces of the stele show a centurion's greaves and vine-staff. (Archaeological Museum, Este; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

Legionary centurions given detached postings to the staff of superior commanders such as provincial governors might, for example, serve as drill-masters (*exercitores*) or even commanders of the governor's *equites singulares* cavalry. There are inscriptions recording such titles as *centurio et campidoctor* (training officer), and *centurio stratorum* ('of the grooms').

Such postings were presumably a useful opportunity to earn the favour of an influential patron, but were not actual promotions. The same was not true of those called *centuriones frumentarii* (or *frumentariorum*), who were given command of the *frumentarii* – soldiers detailed for service away from their legions, acting as a sort of imperial police and intelligence corps. This posting was a definite step up in a centurion's career (CIL XI, 5215, CIL VI, 1080). The ranking centurion was called the *princeps peregrinorum*, and the corps' Rome headquarters was termed the *castra peregrina*. The *centuriones frumentarii* were sometimes still connected with their legions (CIL II, 1450; III, 1980, 4787, 4801?, 7041, 7420; VI, 423), but this was not the general rule, and in most cases the connection must have been merely nominal. For example, an inscription in the House of the Vestals in Rome attests that at the time of Alexander Severus (r. 222–235) a certain Titus Flavius Domitianus, ex-*speculator* of Legio III Parthica Severiana, ranked as *hastatus* (third-ranking centurion) in Legio X Fretensis, and at the same time held the position of *princeps peregrinorum*. This command of the *frumentarii* would certainly require his presence in Rome, while the legion of which he was nominally a senior member was stationed in Palestine.

THE LATER EMPIRE

In the early 3rd century all the ancient rank titles still appear in the sources (SHA, *Clod. Alb.*, XI, 6; *Al. Sev.*, L, 2; CIL III, 4114 = 10888). After the army reforms of Diocletian and Constantine (rr. AD 284–305, 306–337) we still find the rank of centurion, but this seems now to have been incorporated as simply part of the complex military structures of the Late Empire. In general, the 'old-style' units such as *legiones* (regardless of these being later

Detail of the monument to Marcus Petronius Classicus, from Poetovium, AD 20–45, showing the helmet with a *crista transversa* of very clearly carved feathers – compare with Plate B3. (Archaeological Museum, Ptuj, Slovenia; photo courtesy Dr Mojca Vomer Gojkovič)

classed as *palatinae*, *comitatenses* or *limitanei*), *cohortes* and *alae* retained the traditional internal structure and rank system, which indeed would survive until the 7th century. The distinction between *cohortes*, *centuriae* and *manipuli* within the legion is still remembered by Ammianus (Amm. Marc. XVII, 13, 25; XXI, 13, 9; XXIII, 5, 15; XXIV, 6, 9; XXV, 3, 4; XXVI, 2, 3; XXVII, 10, 10).Their officers continued to be called tribunes, centurions and decurions; but at the same time 'new-style' units were created – the *comitatenses*, namely *scholae*, *vexillationes*, *auxilia palatina* and some *cunei* – with an apparently different hierarchy of ranks and appointments.

Eusebius (*Vita Constantini*, IV, 51) states that when the Emperor Constantine divided the empire between his three sons, he assigned to each of them teachers in the arts of the war, and a retinue consisting of infantry of several classes (*óplitai*, *doryphóroi*, *somatofylakes*), commanded respectively by centurions (*lochagoi*), generals (*strategoí*) and tribunes (*taxíarchoi*). In these infantry units, and in the new raised Scholae Palatinae, below the senior officer rank known as senator we find the *ducenarius* (commander of 200 men), and the *centurio* in the old-style units, together with the *centenarius* (commander of 100 men) in the Scholae, the Comitatus of the Dux, and in other infantry and cavalry units such as the Cataphractarii and Sagittarii.

A rank structure for the late 4th century cavalry is indicated in a passage by Hieronymus in *c.* AD 386–387 (*Liber contra Iohannem Hierosolimitanum*, 19); in ascending order from raw recruit upwards, this sequence is *tiro*, *eques* or *pedes*, *semissalis*, *circitor*, *biarchus*, *centenarius*, *ducenarius*, *senator* and *tribunus*. (Interestingly, Vegetius mentions the *ducenarius* as a rank between the centurion and the *primus pilus* of his 'Legio Antiqua'.) It is, however, clear that by the 380s the previously high status of the most flexible rank in the Roman military tradition had fallen to simply that of the 'officer commanding 100 men'.

With the division of the empire, the rank of *centurio* or *centenarius* is mentioned at the beginning of the 5th century in both the armies, but after the fall of the West it survived only in the East. The *legio* or *bandon* was commanded by a *tribunus* or *comes*, assisted by a *vicarius*. Each unit was still divided into centuries (*lochoi*), under the command of a *centurio* or *centenarius*, and each *centuria* was divided in *dekarchiai* (ten-man squads). The *legio* of the 5th century counted only about 1,000 men, while the average strength of its constituent part, then termed a *numerus*, was about 500 men. The *centurio* or *centenarius* still commanded 100 men in the late 5th century.

CAREERS

Selection and appointment

In the Consular period almost the only, and certainly the most important qualification for the centurionate had been bravery and leadership in battle. By the early Principate and thereafter, additional qualities were required, recalled by Vegetius in the late 4th century AD. The infantry centurion was chosen for his stature, strength, and skill at arms. He was to be vigilant, temperate, and ready to execute orders without question; he must be a strict disciplinarian, active in exercising his soldiers, and ensuring that they were clean and well-dressed, with brightly polished weapons (*Ep.*, II, 14). Centurions should be literate, ideally at least 30 years old, with some years of military service behind them. To a great extent the centurionate received men who were already part of an elite cadre, combining the military virtues with the necessary administrative competence.

Since they were socially heterogeneous, they had varying levels of literacy, but this might be respectable. The official language of the army was still Latin until AD 630, but in the Eastern Empire the main spoken language had been Greek since as early as the 1st century. So Greek words and 'translations' (e.g. *hekantontarch* for *centurio*) – known from earlier sources such the Gospels, Josephus and Arrian – were probably the nomenclature used alongside the Latin terms in the 'real-world' Eastern Roman army since the early Empire. There are references in the New Testament to centurions who spoke both Latin and Greek, and, by implication, probably Aramaic as well (e.g. *Matthew*, VIII, 5–13; *Acts*, X, 22–48).

Although in the early period they usually rose from the ranks, some well-connected men who secured letters of recommendation from important patrons were appointed centurions straight from civilian life, through the exercise of patronage on their behalf. The youngest recorded beneficiary of this sort of 'direct commission' was an 18-year-old; the relevant inscription (CIL, III, 1480) shows that the candidate was a member of the equestrian order – the distinct and superior 'knightly' social class of the wealthy bourgoisie. Many passages in the literature indicate that young men of the better classes often solicited the emperor for a direct appointment as centurion – either because they wished to follow the profession of arms seriously, or because of straitened financial circumstances.

At the bottom of the stele to M. Petronius Classicus are representations of his greaves flanking his vine-staff. (Archaeological Museum, Ptuj, Slovenia; photo courtesy Dr Mojca Vomer Gojkovič)

Central panel of the monument to M. Petronius Classicus, showing part of the squared harness upon which his decorations of *torques* and *phalerae* are mounted – compare with Plate B3. (Archaeological Museum, Ptuj, Slovenia; photo courtesy Dr Mojca Vomer Gojkovič)

Wax encaustic portrait of a Trajanic-period officer from Fayoum, Egypt; the sword baldric over his right shoulder suggests that he is a centurion – see Plate E2. (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, inv. 33257; photo courtesy Dr Ashraf Nageh)

Nominally, a centurion's appointment had to be approved by the emperor himself; in practice the name of a serving soldier was presumably submitted via a chain of recommendation, from his unit officers up through the governor of the province. Letters by Pliny the Younger (III, 8; IV, 4) attest that other powerful persons might try to exercise their influence in favour of candidates. Particular bureaucrats in the imperial administration dealt with such matters; at the end of the 1st century AD, Statius wrote that the chief of the office *ab epistulis* was involved in the appointment of centurions (*Silvae*, V, 1, 94–95). The historian Birley stressed the role of this bureau in the careers of centurions, whose 'dossiers' it kept. Juvenal (*Satires*, XIV, 193) wrote that the office *a libellis* dealt with requests for appointments directed to the emperor. When an application was approved, it was a third office of the imperial chancellory – *a codicillis* – that was responsible for drawing up the written document of appointment, or *codicillus*.

Although it might seem hard to believe that the Emperor of Rome personally concerned himself with this process, Campbell and Dobson have estimated an annual requirement amounting only to some 90 new centurions for the legions and seven for the Praetorians, and the selection of 12 civilians for direct commissions from among the names submitted by patrons. While it seems unlikely that all decisions about candidates for the centurionate would be laid before the emperor in person, his involvement would be symbolically important in cases of promotion for courage on the battlefield, and practically important when choices demanded some delicacy – as, for example, when the candidate had been put forward following acclamation by his fellow soldiers (especially during the periods of civil war). It is also plausible that decisions relating to troop movements and postings obliged the emperor and his closest advisers to maintain at least a minimum knowledge of the members of the most important officer class in his armies. Some decisions were certainly made explicity by emperors: Caracalla (r. AD 211–217) even appointed as centurions some men of his Germanic bodyguard, the famous Leones (Cassius Dio, LXXIX,7).

An official ceremony was held for the investiture of a new centurion. An interesting votive inscription (AE.1993, 1363) from the 3rd century AD was discovered in the camp of Legio I Italica at Novae in modern Bulgaria. This centurion thanked the gods for his promotion (*ordinatio*) as *primus pilus* of his legion, obtained – according to Speidel's interpretation – by the choice of the legionary tribunes. The ceremony would have been held on an auspicious military holiday, and – by analogy with Josephus's description of a pay parade – it would have taken place in the presence of the legionaries, turned out in all their finery (*BJ*, V, 349–351). A dais would have been erected in the courtyard of the Principia of the camp or fortress, and the ceremony was probably perfomed by the legion's tribunes; the candidate became a centurion at the moment when he was presented with

his vine-staff and the *codicillus* containing the imperial edict of appointment. The account by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Hist. Eccl.*, VII, 15) of the martyrdom of one Marinos, denounced as a Christian by another soldier during his investiture, makes clear that the ceremony was conducted in front of the troops, and that it involved the presentation of the *vitis*.

Monument to Marcus Cocceius Superianus, a centurion of Legio X Gemina, and his brother Valerius Lucilianus, a member of the Praetorian Guard; 2nd–3rd centuries AD, from Lobor-Zlatar, Croatia. They are shown flanking their mother, Septimia Lucilla, who dedicated the stele, probably together with their father Cocceius Superianus, a *signifer* of Legio X Gemina. Under close examination both brothers can be seen to wear the long-sleeved *tunica militaris manicata*, fitted *anaxyrides* trousers, closed *calcei* boots, and the *sagum* cloak. A millefiori buckle is represented on the centre of the bossed *cingulum*, and the sword scabbard with circular chape hangs from a baldric decorated with circular *phalerae*. Both tunics are decorated with three ranges of vertical stripes (*clavi* or *loroi*); and the cloak is fastened at the right shoulder by a round *fibula*. (Zagreb Archaeological Museum; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

Career progression and social class

During the early Empire, legionary centurions gradually rose in seniority within their cohort, commanding centuries with successively higher precedence, until they commanded the senior *centuria* and therefore the whole cohort. Most centurions of the Second to Tenth cohorts seem not to have advanced beyond this level. Only the very best were then promoted to become *primi ordines*, commanding the five doubled *centuriae* of the First Cohort, and also taking on staff roles within the legion. Such promotion was initially to *hastatus posterior* of the First Cohort, and thence in four steps to *primus pilus*.

This rank was the most coveted and the most difficult to reach, because it demanded considerable education, administrative talent, and the support of an influential patron. The appointment as 'first javelin' in a legion could only be held for one year, after which he either retired (rarely), or moved on in his career. All those who had occupied the position of *primus pilus* formed a class or order called *primipilares*, and enjoyed special rewards and privileges (Suet., *Gaius*, 44). Those who continued in the army thereafter might be appointed for a time to the staffs of commanding officers, or were at the emperor's disposal for temporary duties and extra-legionary commands.

The primipilate became the chief gateway by which men of modest background and fortune might gain admission to positions usually reserved for members of the privileged classes. All *primipilares* or ex-*primipili* were granted by the emperor a sum of money sufficient to qualify them for admission to the equestrian order, thus opening the way to possible appointments as tribunes and prefects. In some cases a man might hold the primipilate twice, in two different legions – sometimes consecutively (*primus pilus bis*), sometimes with one or more other posts intervening (*primus pilus iterum*). In most cases – particularly after the period of the Flavian emperors – the first primipilate was followed by appointment as a tribune in the city of Rome (in ascending importance, *tribunus cohortis vigilum*, *tribunus cohortis urbanae*), and a second primipilate by the tribunate of a Praetorian cohort. The records of such promotions suggest that these city tribunates were even more exclusively reserved for the *primipilares* than were the commands of auxiliary units for officers of equestrian birth – no doubt emperors believed that they could more safely entrust their own security and the tranquillity of the capital to these

The sarcophagus of a late 3rd-century Roman centurion was used in early Christian times to house the remains of St Victor, a Roman officer martyred under the Emperor Maximianus Herculius (r. 286–305). An officer, displaying the characteristics of a centurion of the time of Claudius II to Maximianus, is depicted four times on the sarcophagus – mounted, in two hunting scenes (note the javelin or *verutum* – see Plate F2), and standing, holding the mushroom-headed staff of rank typical of the Tetrarchic period. (Crypt of St Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan; author's photos, by permission of the Milan Archdiocese)

hardened old soldiers than to young officers of the superior classes. It is noteworthy that there are many examples of *primipilares* promoted to legionary tribunates during the 1st century AD, despite the fact that during the early part of this period there were not enough tribunes' positions for all the candidates of senatorial birth who sought them (Suet., *Aug.*, 28).

Among those advanced from the primipilate to legionary tribunates, many had been made *primipili* after having already occupied commands that confirm their pre-existing equestrian status (CIL, XI, 3801; XII, 2455 and 4371). In the large majority of cases the men who advanced from the primipilate to superior commands had apparently begun their careers with direct commissions as legionary centurions and were usually of equestrian rank, though some may have belonged to the so-called 'decurial class' in rural municipalities.

In other cases a second primipilate was followed by an appointment as *praefectus castrorum* (later, *praefectus legionis*), or as a *procurator*. (It would seem that emperors held out the hope of this latter – a lucrative post in the administration of a province – to induce trusted officers to accept a second appointment as *primus pilus* in the meantime.) One example was M. Pompeius Asper, *primus pilus* of Legio III Cyrenaica, who was then appointed *praefectus castrorum* of Legio XX Valeria Victrix, and subsequently rose to *praefectus legionis*, *legatus legionis*, *tribunus cohortis vigilum*, *tribunus cohortis urbanae*, *tribunus cohortis praetoriae*, and so on.

In cases of direct imperial appointments, the career of a centurion might carry him to the highest levels of society. Some rose to be admitted to the Senate – although, according to Cassius Dio (LXII, 26, 6), Maecenas advised Augustus to admit only those who had commenced their military careers as directly commissioned centurions, and not those promoted from the ranks. Cassius Dio also mentions one ex-centurion who actually rose to the elevated rank of *praefectus urbis* in Rome. A certain Adventus had first served as a mercenary among the spies and scouts, and had then been appointed centurion; he was later advanced by Macrinus (r. 217–218) to a procuratorship, then appointed a senator, co-consul, and finally Prefect of

Stele of an unidentified centurion from Aquileia, end of the 3rd century AD. He holds a *vitis* with the mushroom-shaped head, and his *cingulum* is fastened with a ring buckle. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Aquileia; author's photos, courtesy of the museum)

the City, though by then 'he could neither see by reason of old age, nor read for lack of education, nor accomplish anything for want of experience' (Cass. Dio, LXXIX,14). The reason for Adventus's advancement was the support that he gave to Macrinus in front of the legions when the latter was proclaimed emperor following the assassination of his predecessor, Caracalla, at Carre, so at that time Adventus was probably either a legionary *primus pilus* or a centurion of the Praetorian Guard.

Many centurions of humble origin climbed high in times of anarchy during the 3rd and 4th centuries, and some even to the throne itself; for instance, Maximinus Thrax (r. 235–238) had been a *primus pilus* under Caracalla (SHA, *Maxim.*, IV, 4). However, even in more generally settled times we find the sons and grandsons of centurions profiting from the social mobility that this rank could bring; the best example is probably the Emperor Vespasian (r. AD 69–79), whose grandfather and father were respectively an *evocatus* ex-centurion and a former *primus pilus* (Suet., *Vesp.*, 2).[1]

Despite these examples of glittering careers, however, many men served for decades in the same rank without ever being promoted. There are examples of men in their sixties and even seventies still serving as centurions in their legions (CIL VIII, 217 – Petronius Fortunatus; CIL VIII,

1 In 1907 the historian G.H. Allen suggested a career sequence for officers in the Severan army at the turn of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD – see Bibliography. This was based on two stone pedestals (CIL VI, 1057 and 1058) from the Caelian Hill in Rome, one erected in AD 210 and the other a few years earlier, and each inscribed with the names of about a thousand soldiers of Cohors V Vigilum; many individuals whose names appeared on the earlier stone as common soldiers are listed on the later stone as *principales*. By comparing these lists with the wider epigraphic record, Allen compiled a suggested sequence of the successive steps of advancement in the army. In brief, Allen suggested five main paths of promotion to legionary centurion:
(1) From centurion of troops stationed in Rome, to a more senior legionary centurion's post. In some instances a Praetorian centurion was promoted directly to *primus pilus* of a legion; so far as we can judge from the scarce evidence, a promotion from centurion in the Praetorian cohorts direct to a tribunate would be extraordinary.
(2) From *principalis* in a city garrison unit, directly to the legionary centurionate. (Note that all promoted from *principalis* to centurion within the Rome garrison cohorts had previously served as *evocati*.)
(3) From legionary *principalis* to legionary centurion, after at least ten years' military service.
(4) From centurion or decurion of an auxiliary unit, to legionary centurion; in some cases these had been legionary soldiers before being promoted on their transfer into the auxiliaries.
(5) Counter-intuitively, some officers of equestrian birth were appointed legionary centurions not before but after having filled one or more of the positions reserved for members of that social order (for example, CIL, II, 2424 gives the *cursus honorum* of one individual as: *praefectus cohortis – centurio – primus pilus*; and CIL X, 5829 lists another as *praefectus cohortis – tribunus legionis – centurio – primus pilus*).

General view and detail of the panoply of a centurion from the Trophaeum Traiani, the monument at the Adamklissi city gate restored by Constantine the Great in AD 316. The armour depicted is a typical scaled *lorica squamata* of the 3rd century AD, but is noteworthy for the breast decoration; this represents Mars Ultor, with a transverse helmet crest. Interestingly, the sword is slung on the right side. See Plate F1. (Adamklissi Museum; author's photos, courtesy of the museum)

2877 – T. Flavius Virilis). Of the 18 centurions known to have served for over 40 years, only four are recorded as having been appointed *primus pilus*.

* * *

It is clear from the above that centurions fell into two distinct groups: those who were promoted from the ranks; and those who began their military careers with 'direct commissions' into the centurionate – significant numbers of whom were already of the equestrian class that ex-rankers could only achieve by reaching the pinnacle of legionary promotion as *primipili*.

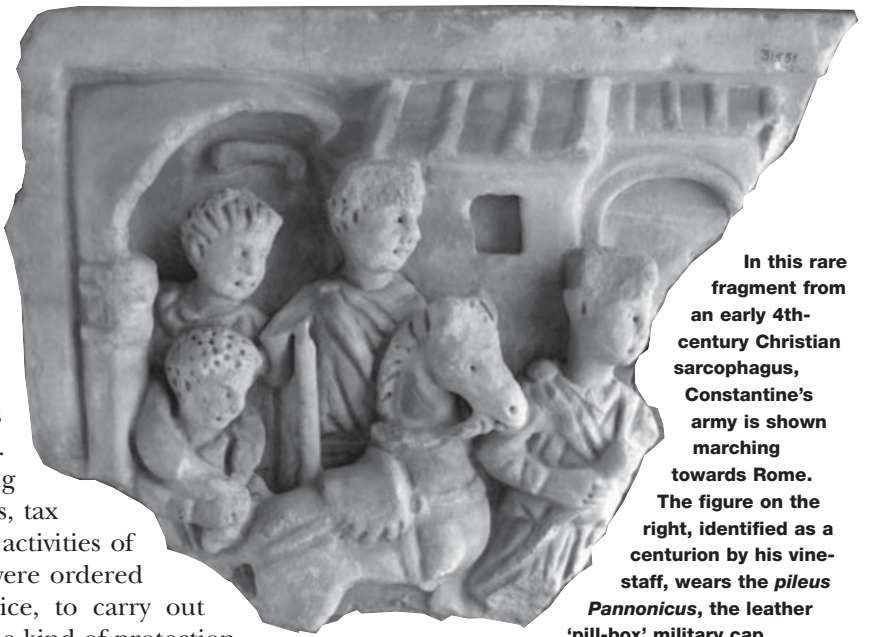
It is to be expected that those who subsequently rose from the centurionate to high commands belonged to the latter class, due to their combination of younger age, practical experience and social connections, and this is broadly confirmed by the inscriptions. Most of those who advanced beyond *primus pilus* had begun their careers as 'directly commissioned' centurions, or, in exceptional cases, were ex-soldiers of the Praetorian cohorts who had been promoted centurion. The prefects and tribunes who were former centurions – usually called *viri militares* – probably became more numerous as the higher social classes gradually withdrew from military service during the 3rd century. We find in this period examples of legionary *principales* who rose to become *primi pili*, and finally attained the equestrian positions. It has been conjectured that in the 3rd century the centurionate became the first position in the regular equestrian career path (*cursus honorum*), but the epigraphic evidence is still insufficient to prove this. From the mid-3rd century there was certainly greater social mobility, in that men of the equestrian class were now being appointed to more senior posts previously held only by senators, such as the command of a legion. These men, with the advantage of greater military experience as former senior centurions, often took command of substantial forces, and were given the title *dux*.

Quasi-military duties

Centurions fulfilled a wide range of state duties besides the command of units; for example, they were responsible for logistics, in that they supervised the collection of provisions for the army by contractors (FIRA, 3, n.137). Centurions and ex-centurion *evocati* are also recorded in police and even judicial roles. They were responsible for escorting important prisoners – e.g., the centurion charged with escorting St Paul to the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem, who protected him from the attacks of the Jewish mob (*Acts*, XXI, 38). They commanded the troops sent out to hunt down brigands, both in Italy and the provinces. The military authorities were charged with the arrest and execution of small-time criminals, and in

practice such cases would be delegated to the man in charge of a detachment of soldiers – often a centurion.

A number of legal cases recorded on papyri in Egypt suggest that centurions also exercised an informal but effective judicial authority, arriving at *de facto* remedies for litigants (and there is no reason to suppose that the same was not true in other provinces). The cases dealt with – among other things – assaults, thefts, tax collection, and the criminal activities of administrators. Centurions were ordered to bring individuals to justice, to carry out searches, and to provide some kind of protection for litigants who were presumably unable or unwilling to exercise their full legal rights but who hoped for a quick settlement. It is interesting that they or their advisers appealed to Roman centurions as figures of authority. Clearly, local people would want to keep on the right side of them, and in practice centurions, backed up by their soldiers, administered a kind of rough-and-ready justice. They thus brought the operation of the central government right into village life, and emphasized the apparently all-seeing presence of the Roman army.



In this rare fragment from an early 4th-century Christian sarcophagus, Constantine's army is shown marching towards Rome. The figure on the right, identified as a centurion by his vine-staff, wears the *pileus Pannonicus*, the leather 'pill-box' military cap characteristic of this period – see Plate G1. (Musei Vaticani, Città del Vaticano; photo author's collection)

RISKS & REWARDS

On campaign, the centurion was held personally responsible for the efficiency of the men under his command, and in battle he was expected to provide unflinching personal leadership. Apart from the dangers of hand-to-hand combat that they faced in their regular service, centurions – despite their privileged status – were by no means immune from the harshest punishments themselves. From those to whom much was given, much was demanded, and a perceived failure of courage or judgement might bring execution (Suet., *Aug.*, XXIV; *Tib.*, 60) – even crucifixion (SHA, *Avid. Cass.*, IV, 6; *Clod. Alb.*, XI, 6). A centurion's immediate reward for submitting himself to such mercilessly high expectations was the pay, and it has been estimated that in the early 1st century AD this was about 15 times that of a legionary.[2] Campbell and Dobson have calculated that a centurion received five times the salary of a Praetorian guardsman, and a

2 During the reign of Augustus, the total annual salary bill for the centurions of the Second to Tenth Cohorts of the 25 legions then existing has been calculated at *c.* 13,500 sesterces; that for the First Cohort *primi ordines* at *c.* 27,000 sesterces, plus *c.* 54,000 for the *primipili*; so the annual grand total was 94,500 sesterces – roughly 4 per cent of the regular army's total annual pay bill of *c.* 2,362,500 sesterces. To set this in context, at that time the state's entire outgoings on the army and the navy has been calculated at *c.* 370 million sesterces. By Domitian's reign (AD 81–96) this military budget had risen to *c.* 600 million sesterces; the pay bill for the legionary centurions was then *c.* 36 million, and by the reign of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) it had risen to *c.* 60 million sesterces.

Portrait detail, and general view, of the monument to the senior centurion M. Caelius, who died in the Teutoburg Forest disaster of AD 9; see Plate A3 for reconstruction. The inscription (CIL 13.8648) is translated as follows: 'M. Caelius, son of Titus, of the tribe Lemonia, from Bononia, centurion of Legion XIIX [i.e. 18 – XVIII], 53½ years old, fell in Varus's war. Permission is granted to place his bones within [the monument]. His brother Publius Caelius, son of Titus, of the tribe Lemonia, erected this.' This gives us the centurion's *praenomen* (Marcus, or Manlius?); his *nomen* (Caelius), clearly of Etruscan origin; his *origo* (Bononia, in northern Italy); and his *gens* (Lemonia). His bones were, of course, never recovered to be placed under the monument; at best, they may have been among those gathered up from the site of the massacre and buried on the spot by Germanicus Caesar's army in AD 15. (Rheinisches Landes Museum, Bonn; detail photo courtesy Dr Stefano Izzo; main photo Nic Fields)

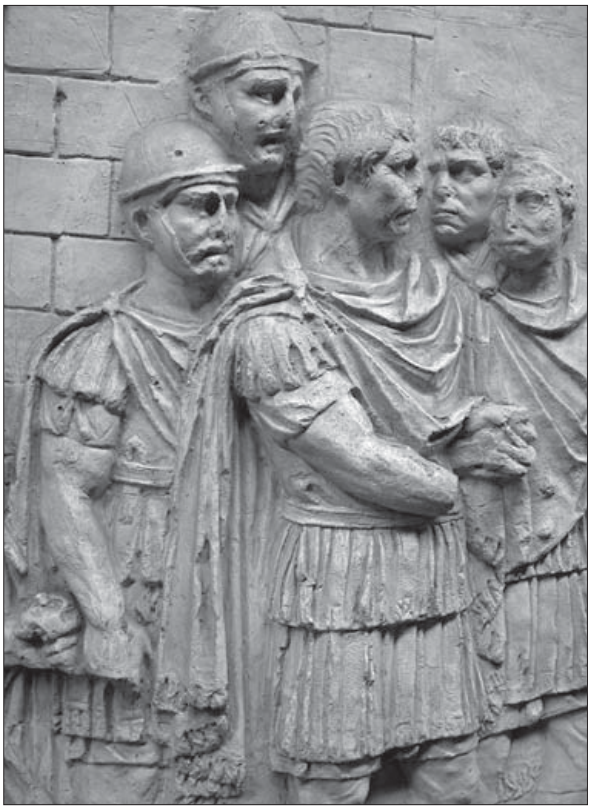
primus pilus 20 times as much – and thus about 60 times the pay of a legionary *miles gregarius*.

At intervals, emperors also granted donatives – cash bonuses – to the troops, on such occasions as their accession, the celebration of an important victory, or some other happy public event. These were also granted simply at times when it was judged wise to bolster the army's loyalty, and it is not surprising that on these occasions the Praetorians and the legionary centurions received more generous sums than the common soldiers. In addition to their wages and bonuses, of course, centurions were known for coercing bribes from soldiers to show them favourable treatment (it was the centurion alone who could allocate men for harder or easier tasks, or recommend them for promotion to *principalis*). This abuse was so endemic that emperors were obliged to tolerate it, and the granting of a donative was sometimes a tacit way of enabling the troops to pay off their debts.

The loyalty and obedience of the legions depended to a significant extent on the loyalty of the centurions, particularly the *primi ordines*, whose influence might be crucial in times of unrest or disputed succession. It was one evidence of Caligula's reckless madness that he apparently deprived many *primi pili* of their careers – on the pretence of age and infirmity – when they were only just short of qualifying for the rewards of completing their service (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 44). When Commodus advanced Pescennius Niger to the consulship ahead of Severus, the latter was angrily convinced that he had been denied the honour on the advice of the *primipilares* (SHA, *Pesc. Nig.*, V, 6). The literature includes many instances of centurions of the Praetorian Guard in Rome being recruited for conspiracies to depose emperors (Suet., *Tib.*, 12; *Div. Claud.*, 11), and when weak or unpopular emperors were with their armies in the field the senior legionary centurions might exploit their proximity to power in the same way. In a speech of 29 BC, Agrippa advised Augustus to reserve for his own decision legal cases that threatened centurions who were prominent in their home communities with disenfranchisement or death, and the right to punish centurions for crimes committed against civilians was also reserved to the emperor.

It was among the centurionate that emperors and other magnates sought trustworthy and ruthless men to act as their agents on delicate – or criminal – missions. These might involve simply acting as secret personal couriers or envoys (Herodian, *Rom. Hist.*, VII, 6, 5; Amm. Marc., XVIII, VI, 20–22). However, many centurions were also employed as thugs or assassins, to intimidate or murder personalities who were too prominent to attack openly (e.g., Suet., *Tib.*, 53; *Div. Claud.*, 29; SHA, *Did. Jul.*, 5; *Pesc. Nig.*, 2). The future Emperor Caracalla ordered centurions of the Praetorian Guard to kill his brother Geta in the presence of his mother (Cass. Dio, LXXVIII, 2) – though he was not above wielding the blade in person, as in the case of the Praetorian Prefect, Plautianus (Cass. Dio, LXXVII).

While such involvement in the affairs of the powerful might bring short-term rewards it was obviously extremely dangerous, especially if a centurion chose the wrong side; but such risks were hardly a novelty, especially to men who were tough enough to have risen from the ranks.



Trajan surrounded by his *primi ordines*, from Trajan's Column, first quarter of the 2nd century AD. (Cast, Museo della Civiltà Romana; photo author's collection)

SOCIAL STATUS

From early in the Empire a significant proportion of centurions were drawn from the equestrian class, and among these men Italians were the most prominent group. These officers already enjoyed an important status in Roman society. There was nothing to prevent equestrians who had received a direct commission into the centurionate from being appointed eventually to the Senate, the highest council of state (Cass. Dio., LII, 24) – a highly desirable goal, especially for ex-centurions of the Praetorian Guard living in Rome.

There was also a gradual increase in the proportion of more humbly-born men who rose from the centurionate to equestrian rank, and were then promoted to further posts in the civil administration. While it is clear that this practice went back at least to the reign of Hadrian (r. AD 117–138), it was especially evident under Septimius Severus. Perhaps – as suggested by Campbell – Severus consciously planned to change the basis of Roman local government by appointing men with a tough military background to junior positions, with the intention of gradually advancing them further to form a new class of robust and obedient administrators. However, on the available evidence, in the Severan period only just over 30 per cent of equestrian procurators with former military service were ex-centurions, while more than 57 per cent had held the traditional equestrian ranks.

Centurions were particularly well provided for in retirement, and often became leading citizens in their communities. One inscription from Varia near Tivoli (CIL, XIV 3472) records that the retired centurion M. Helvius Rufus Civica paid for the building of public baths for his fellow citizens and travellers. Even during their regular service, centurions – like other

Trajan and bodyguards, from Metopa X of the Adamklissi Monument, first quarter of the 2nd century AD. Given his close proximity to the emperor, the man on the right, wearing the sword on the left side of his body, can perhaps be identified as a Praetorian centurion, or even as a *praepositus* of the Equites Singulares – compare with Plate D. (ex-Florescu; author's collection)

soldiers – might be active in business: buying and selling property, contracting debts for investment, and lending money. The economic acumen of the centurions and tribunes of the Praetorian Guard even prompted the Emperor Caligula (r. AD 37–41) to raise new taxes on them (Suet., *Gaius.*, 40). The profession of 'tax-farmer' – contracted tax-gatherer – was often held by officers of ability and means, especially *primipilares* (CIL III. 6809). It was probably to boost economic activity in the territory of Antium that the Emperor Nero (r. AD 54–68) established a colony with veterans of the Praetorian Guard, and obliged the wealthiest of the chief centurions to move there (Suet., *Nero*, 47).

Religious observances

Religion was a fundamental aspect in the life of a centurion; these officers played a central role in the religious life of the army, which was intimately linked to the concepts of hierarchy and loyalty. The various dedicatory inscriptions that they left during the 1st–3rd centuries AD form an important part of the epigraphic record; they often identify individuals and units, and may include dating evidence. Some 125 inscriptions by

centurions of the Rhine army have recently been analyzed by Piret; ten of these were made by *primipili*.

Such votive inscriptions generally appeal to, or record thanks to, the gods for favour, a success or an achievement, in the name of an individual or a unit. It is noteworthy that the centurions making these dedications were often in command of *vexillationes* – detachments serving away from their legions – or of *auxilia*; in such circumstances no more senior officer might be available to carry out this pious duty. Some inscriptions simply solicit good health for the dedicatee and his family; some offer thanks for divine favour in such matters as a journey safely completed or success in the hunt, or even acknowledge a divine vision experienced by an individual. Some record a promotion, e.g. one from Bu Njem (AE, 1991.1620) raised by Aurelius Variscen on his appointment as centurion in Legio III Augusta, as requested by his *vexillatio*. During periods of intensive warfare, such as the 2nd-century campaigns against the Quadi and Marcomanni, centurions offered collective dedications to the gods, asking for divine protection for a whole unit; in many such cases they simultaneously prayed for the good health and fortune of the emperor (CIL, XIII, 7996, 8203). Some specify the accompanying sacrificial offering; e.g., a bronze tablet found near Tongeren records the dedication of a spear and shield to the goddess Vihansa – a local Germanic deity – by Q. Catius Libo, a centurion of Legio III Cyrenaica (ILS 4755 = XIII 3592). The III Cyrenaica was stationed in the East, so Libo was not serving locally; the most probable context is that he was a returning soldier fulfilling a vow made before his departure, to deposit his weapons at Vihansa's shrine if he came safely home.

Dedications were made to a very wide range of deities: to those of the Roman pantheon, especially Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Hercules, Minerva, and Juno Regina; to the Imperial cult; to local deities whose attributes were identified with those of Roman gods and godesses, or (rarely in the Rhineland) to purely Celtic deities such as 'the Mothers'; to divine personifications, such as Victory; to the spirits of the place, or the unit (*genii loci*, *genii centuriae*); and to the standards of the legions – the cult of the eagle was popular among *primipili*. Since early in the Empire many centurions had also joined Oriental cults, such as those of Jupiter Dolichenus (typically represented in uniform – CIL, XIII, 8620), Mithras (CIL, XIII, 7362), and Cybele (CIL, XIII, 6292).

Altars were often raised to mark the completion of a building task. Soldiers of Legio VI Victrix carved this one at Castlecary on the Antonine Wall in Scotland, to commemorate the erection of a temple to Mercury. They give their origins as the province of Noricum (roughly, modern Austria), and – interestingly – Italy. It is estimated that by the mid-2nd century only about one per cent of legionary soldiers were recruited in Italy itself. (Nic Fields)

ARMS & EQUIPMENT

THE EARLY PRINCIPATE

Distinctive characteristics of the centurion's equipment throughout this period included the silvering of elements on his body armour, distinctive insignia on his helmet, greaves on his legs, the wearing of the sword on the left side of the body, and the vine-staff as the symbol of his rank. It is these details that allow us to recognize centurions on those figurative monuments where their rank is not indicated by inscriptions.

A helmet of Weisenau type – Imperial Gallic C or D, by Robinson's classification – from Sisak, Croatia; found in the Kupa river, it has been dated to the second quarter of the 1st century AD. The helmet shows evidence of three layers of decorative plating in silver and gilding, applied at three different times during its use. The small ring preserved on one side, and a corresponding hole on the other side where a ring has been lost, indicate a system for attaching a transverse crest. Both these features strongly suggest the richly decorated helmet of a centurion. (Archaeological Museum, Zagreb; photo courtesy Prof Radman-Livaja)

Helmets

The helmet (*galea*) of the centurion had silvered insignia to allow his men to recognize him easily in battle. Vegetius (*Epit.* II, 16) specifically mentions 'iron helmets, but fitted with silvered and transverse crests, that they might be more easily distinguished by their men'. At least throughout the 1st century AD, continuing the tradition of the Consular period, the crest was usually (but not invariably) the *crista transversa*, i.e. it ran across the helmet from side to side. However, this is clearly visible on only two gravestones: those of T. Calidius Severus from Carnuntum, and of M. Petronius Classicus Marrucinus from Poetovium (see page 8).

On the Arc d'Orange dating from the early Principate the centurion is already equipped with the new kind of helmet of Weisenau typology, but the horsehair crest is set front-to-back and ends in a horse-tail. The helmet of an unknown Augustan centurion from Este (see page 7) – which seems to be of Buggenum type – shows a high front-to-back crest made of ostrich-feathers, very similar to that represented on the Julii monument at Saint-Remy de Provence (see MAA 470). On a frieze representing soldiers of Augustan–Tiberian date from Arles a centurion marching among his men has a crest of plumes arranged transversally.

A splendid helmet recovered from Sisak in Croatia is of Weisenau type and has attachments for a transverse crest; this specimen is more or less contemporary with the Calidius and Marrucinus gravestones, and presents different layers of silvering, thus confirming Vegetius' comment. We can suppose that the crest-holder on such helmets was silvered or painted in silver colour, but even the plumes may also have been coloured in a similar way. However, late military treatises mention helmet crests of the same main colour as the shield, and this may also have applied in the earlier period.

The centurions on Trajan's Column wear helmets apparently of Imperial Gallic and Imperial Italic types, but without any evident crests. Developments of helmets of these two typologies are also visible for centurions on monuments of the Antonine period, together with highly decorated Attic-style helmets, which seem to be particular to centurions of the Praetorian Guard.

In the Eastern provinces of the empire, centurions wore helmets shaped according to the Hellenic style beside more typically Roman types. Clear evidence is provided by the stele of Mikkales, from the end of the 1st century AD, on which a group of centurions are represented. While some wear Attic-style helmets, the centurion performing the military greeting has a Buggenum-type helmet typical of the Italic tradition. Its continued use is confirmed by a bronze specimen of the same date from Bythinia, preserved in the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul.

Shields

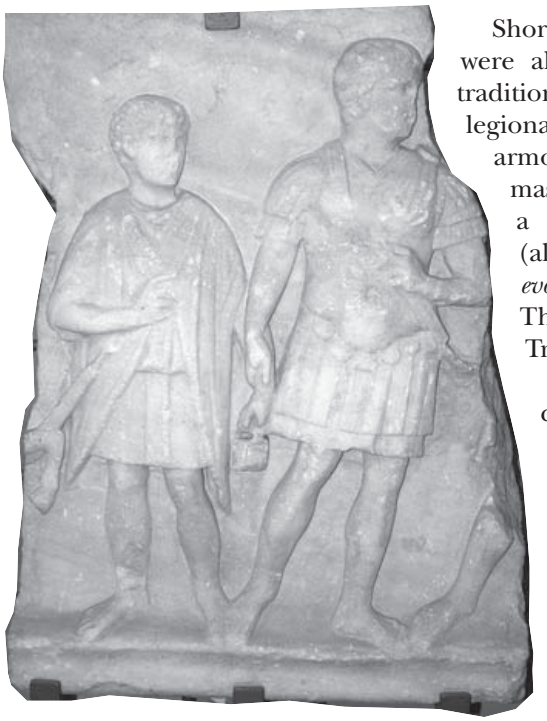
The centurion on the Arc d'Orange has a half-trapezoidal *scutum* of Augustan–Tiberian date, bearing the capricorn *digma* of Legio II Augusta surrounded by two volutes. The centurion's shield was sometimes the same as that carried by his men, and the semi-cylindrical shield is fully attested for centurions in some funerary monuments, e.g. that of L. Blattius of Legio IIII (IV) Macedonica, from Fregole. However, the monument of a centurion or *evocatus* from Liebnitz, today in Graz Museum and probably dating from the 1st century AD or the Hadrianic period, shows the employment of a round *clipeus*, held internally by a single strap corresponding with its boss. The oval shield also used by legionary infantry is the main type found for centurions on monuments of Antonine date, such as the pedestals of the columns of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, among many other figurative sources.

Cheek-guard of another helmet of Weisenau typology, found at Hod Hill in Dorset, England, and dating from the Claudian invasion of AD 43; the surviving fragments show stylistic similarity with the helmet from Sisak. The same site yielded bronze scales plated with white metal, recalling the shape of those represented on the gravestone of Q. Sertorius Festus, and it can not be excluded that helmet and scales were both part of the armour of a centurion. This hypothesis was suggested by the late H. Russell Robinson, who classified the cheek-piece as Imperial Gallic Type F. (British Museum, photo author's collection)

Body armour

Ringmail armour is well documented for centurions of the Augustan–Tiberian period, that on the Arc d'Orange being the most striking example. This *gallica* has short sleeves emerging from under the *humeralia* shoulder guards; of crotch length, it is decorated with an appliqué Medusa mask on the breast. It shows that the Celtic fastening system had became the standard, with a pivoting hook attached to the breast and engaging with the shoulder guards. Metopa X from Adamklissi shows the Emperor Trajan with two soldiers clad in crotch-length mail armour; one of them wears the *gladius* slung on his left side, and can perhaps be identified as a *primus ordo* of Legio I Italica, based in Lower Moesia, to which the monument was probably dedicated.

The 'muscled' cuirass (*lorica*, *thorax*, *statos*), in both leather (*corium*) and metal (*lorica ferrea*) is well attested on grave *stelae* and other monuments. The well-known monument to the centurion M. Caelius of Legio XVIII, killed in the Teutoburg Forest disaster while serving under P. Quinctilius Varus in AD 9, shows (under *torques*, and *phalerae* medallions attached to the usual leather harness) a muscled cuirass with attached shoulder guards. Traces of brown colour indicating a leather *corium* were still visible when the costume historian Hottenroth copied the monument in 1888; the navel detail on the belly precludes the possibility that Caelius's armour was painted to represent mail. The cuirass has short sleeves, to which are directly attached – probably by sewing – two rows of short *pteryges* (protective vertical strips) of the same brown colour. The use of a brown (thus probably leather) muscled cuirass with similar-coloured attached *pteryges* is further confirmed by the painting, dated to the first half of the 1st century AD, in the Villa of Varanus at Stabiae, which shows a man dressed as an officer performing a ritual dance. The 1st century AD Torino stele also shows a centurion in such an armour, probably of leather.



Relief from Augusta Taurinorum, Italy, representing a centurion with his *calo* or servant. The centurion is clad in a 'muscled' armour, probably of bronze (*statos*). His servant wears the *paenula*, the typical soldier's cloak of the early Empire, and has a military dagger hanging at his right hip. (Museo Archeologico, Turin; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

Shorter and more practical metal cuirasses of Hellenic style were also used, like that represented in the Louvre relief traditionally said to represent Praetorians but more probably legionaries of the Emperor Claudius. In this case the muscled armour is worn by a junior officer, distinguished by a gorgon-mask decoration and the fringed *cinctorium*; he is probably a centurion, by analogy with a similar short armour (although clearly made of leather) worn by the *centurio* or *evocatus* from Leibnitz preserved in the Graz Museum. These kinds of armour are still worn by centurions on Trajan's Column.

The gravestone at Graz shows better details of a similar cuirass, with leather shoulder guards shaped like those of an old linen armour, again with a metal plaque centred on the breast representing a gorgon (*gorgoneion*). The short extensions covering the upper arm, shaped as true sleeves, are clearer. A reconstructed centurion in the Museo della Cività Romana shows such leather armour fitted with short sleeves that do not restrict the movement of the arm; it was enough to use soft leather and hardened leather for different parts of the same armour, and to cut a small opening under the armpits to allow movement, as in some buff-leather coats of the 17th century. These shoulder protections were the forerunners of the 'spherical' shoulder defences of Late Imperial muscled armours and corselets.

This is probably also the style of armour worn by M. Favonius Facilis, the centurion of Legio XX Valeria Victrix whose gravestone is in Colchester. H. Russell Robinson considered this armour to be mail, because it is constructed to fit over the shoulders and on the upper arms, but his reasoning – that thick leather would have prevented the man from raising his arm above the elbow – did not take into consideration the presence of the short sleeves. These are not very clearly shown on the unfinished tombstone, but are clearly visible on other monuments where the same armour is represented. A second possibility is that the armour was a Roman version of the Greek *linothorax* made with a very broad neck opening, which would have allowed the wearer to take the cuirass on and off unaided (as recently shown by the British expert model-maker William Brown). In such a case the layers of quilted linen were covered with thin layers of leather, as in the specimen from Vindonissa (Brugg, Switzerland). The armour was probably worn over a *subarmalis* or 'under-cuirass' also made of padded linen.

Moreover, what was considered a broad-plated *cingulum* (military waist belt) on the Facilis monument was probably a leather reinforcement actually on the armour and fitted with metal appiqués, as clearly shown on a painting from the House of the Vetii in Pompeii; there a similar belt, painted red, is shown upon an identical armour, worn by a *tribunus* or *centurio*. This kind of belt, created in this period and attached directly to the armour, survived long into the Byzantine period. The armour has shoulder doubling, which – together with the leather belt – provided further layers of protection over vulnerable areas. A small miniature of a leather armour similar to that of Facilis is shown on a 1st-century AD triumphal relief associated with Legio VII Pia Fidelis from Gardun

(ancient Tilurium) and preserved in Split Museum, Croatia. The holes of the sleeves of the leather armour are perfectly visible, as are the thick *pteryges* at the lower edge.

A third kind of armour worn by centurions was the *squama* (scale) cuirass. In the language of the Eastern legions the epithet *lepidotós*, as applied to a *thorax*, was contrasted with the epithet *folidotós* (Arr., *Tact.*, 13–14); the former denotes a similarity to the scales of a fish, the latter to the scales of a snake. The resemblance to fish scales (*squamae piscis*) is shown on the bronze armour of the mid-1st century AD centurion Quintus Sertorius Festus from Verona, from which Hottenroth probably copied the original colours. Here the scales are similar to feathers (*plumatae*) – ending in a point, and characterized by a raised ridge down the middle. The armour has short sleeves, ending in two rows of overlapping scales, and is worn over a *subarmalis* with *pteryges*. The scales are attached by thongs to a leather backing, which gives to the whole body a slightly 'anatomical' shape when worn. Scales like these have been found in Nekrasovskaya Stanitsa, in a Sarmatian context of the 1st–2nd centuries AD; they are of different sizes, from 2cm (0.78in) to 6–8cm (2.36–3.14in) in length, and 2cm wide. True Roman specimens come from Hod Hill in Dorset, each 2.6cm (1in) long, and plated with white metal.

Tombstone portrait of a *centurio* or *evocatus* from Leibnitz, 1st century AD or Hadrianic period. The distinctions of the *evocati* were identical to those of the centurions, since they had equal status. Note the apparently leather cuirass modelled on the old linen type, with a *gorgoneion* on the breast, and two layers of *pteryges* visible at the upper arm above the short tunic sleeve and apparently integral to the cuirass. The inside surface of the round *clipeus* shield clearly shows a central grip across the concave boss. (Archaeological Museum, Graz; photo courtesy Dr Cesare Rusalen)

Besides metal and leather corselets, the iconography seems to suggest the employment of felt armours. Such padded armour may be visible on the controversial gravestone of the centurion T. Calidius Severus of Legio XV Apollinaris, which has always been interpreted as a scale armour; but if it is, why are the scales cut off abruptly at the lower edge of the corselet? On monuments where scales are effectively represented, the last line of *squamae* overlap the visible part of the under-cuirass. Moreover, the surface of Severus's armour is divided into roughly-carved squared rhomboids, like the typical effect of padded armours (*coactilia* or *centones*) made of heavy felt or wool – as shown on the earlier Arc d'Orange and the later sarcophagus from Split. The Calidius monument thus probably represents a *centone*, and can be inserted in the tradition of the padded doublets worn by centurions and decurions of the Augustan period.

To the author's knowledge, there are no known clear representations or descriptions of centurions wearing the famous *lorica segmentata* – but a strong clue is found on one little-published monument. A carved procession of soldiers from the Templum Gentis Flaviae (*c.* AD 95), whose fragments are shared between the Museo Nazionale Romano and Ann Arbor Museum in the USA, includes, among others, a man wearing an Attic helmet with a richly embossed frontal diadem, and a *lorica segmentata* of Corbridge type. All the soldiers are wearing the same kind of cuirass; but this man seems to have a staff in his right hand, and separated fragments

These greaves – measuring about 40cm (15.75in) by 15cm (5.9in) wide – have been dated as 2nd century AD but are probably 1st century. Of an early type, they show a stylized lion-mask on the knee-piece, volute decoration on the front, and a small 'star' low at centre front, just above the cut-out for the instep. This kind of greave is visible on the monuments to several centurions, e.g. Sertorius Festus at Verona and Calidius at Carnuntum. In the author's view the decorative style and the fastening suggest a date before the end of the 1st century AD. (Private collection)

clearly show both segmented armour and a *gladius* (short sword) slung on the left side. The man depicted was probably a centurion, perhaps of the Praetorian Guard, perhaps of one of the legions that conquered Jerusalem in AD 70 – the Templum Gentis Flaviae was built to celebrate the glory of the Flavian dynasty and their victory in the Jewish War.

On some monuments where the segmented cuirass is represented – e.g. the Column of Marcus Aurelius – it is not easy to distinguish centurions from common soldiers. On the sarcophagus of the Portonaccio, a figure has been identified both by Ross Cowan and by the present author as a possible centurion, perhaps of a cohort of Civium Volontariorum or Diogmitai recruited in the Eastern provinces. He displays banded armour composed of two separate pieces, clearly made of leather fixed to a cloth backing. Perhaps this organic form of *lorica segmentata* was in use in the Eastern provinces (as seems to be attested by other monuments), and, if our identification is correct, that included use by centurions.

Greaves

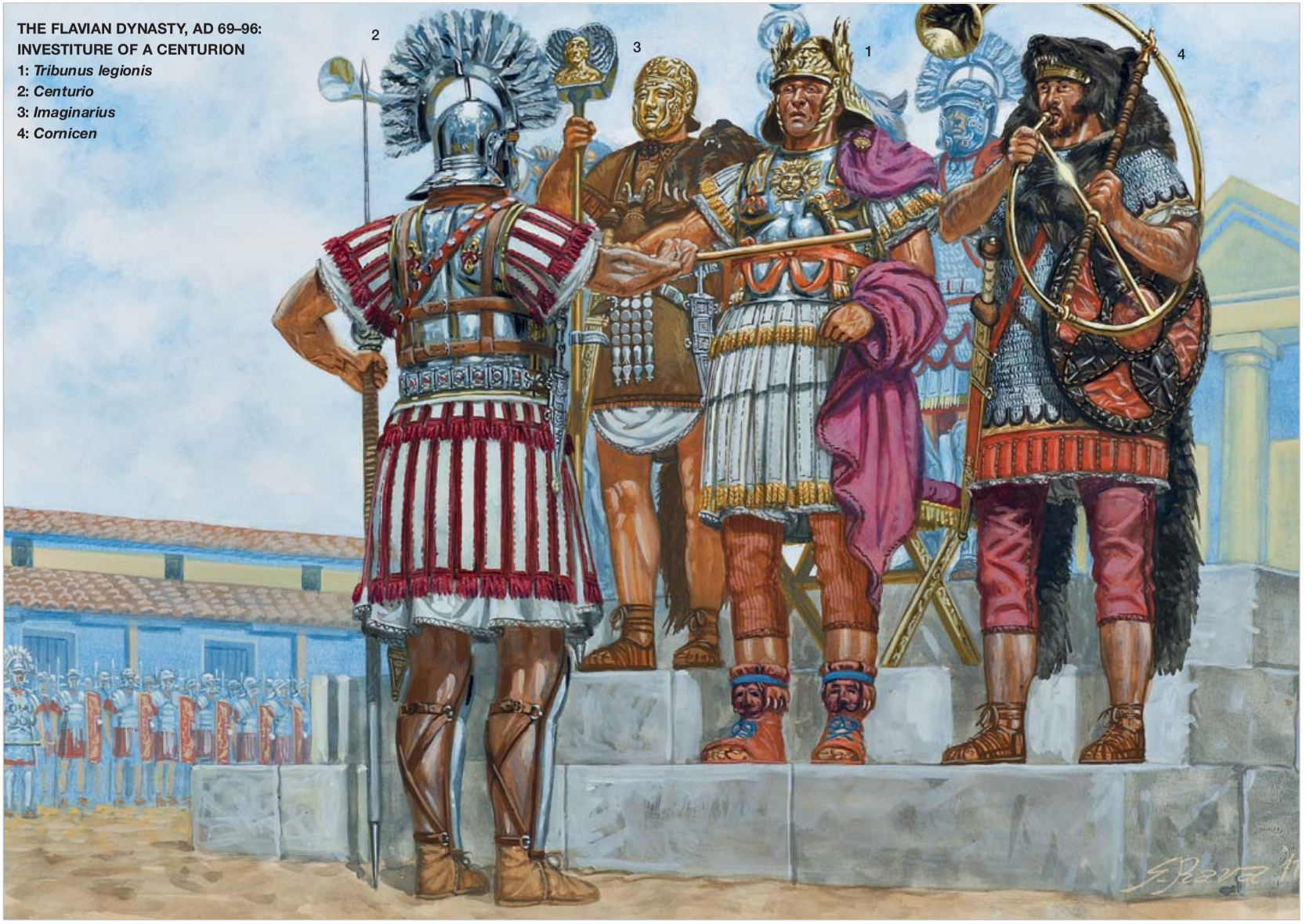
Leg armour was a constant in the equipment of centurions of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Greaves of Greek typology with embossed knee-protectors are worn by the centurion on the Arc d'Orange, and are shown on a fragmentary monument from Avignon. Embossed greaves are visible on many monuments and centurions' tombstones – e.g. those of Calidius Severus, Sertorius Festus and Marrucinus – and on the Trophaeum Traiani at Adamklissi, whose panoply probably represents a Praetorian centurion or a *primus pilus* of the victorious Legio I Italica. A rare

Detail of the elaborately embossed greaves on the Sertorius Festus monument; these were probably made in a springy copper alloy, then silvered, perhaps with gilt decoration. (Archaeological Museum, Verona: author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

(continued on page 33)

AUGUSTAN–TIBERIAN PERIOD, 1st CENTURY BC–1st CENTURY AD
1: L. Blattius Vetus, Legio IV Macedonica, end of 1st cent BC
2: Centurion of Legio II Augusta, AD 21
3: M. Caelius, Legio XVIII , AD 9

THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN DYNASTY, AD 14–64
1: Q. Sertorius Festus, Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis
2: Titus Calidius Severus, Legio XV Apollinaris
3: M. Petronius Classicus Marrucinus, Legio VIII Augusta


THE FLAVIAN DYNASTY, AD 69–96:
INVESTITURE OF A CENTURION
1: *Tribunus legionis*
2: *Centurio*
3: *Imaginarius*
4: *Cornicen*
2
3
1
4

TRAJAN'S FIRST DACIAN CAMPAIGN, AD 101–102
1: Emperor Trajan
2 & 3: *Primi ordines*, battle order
4: *Centurio ordinarius* of Legio IV Flavia Felix
1
2
3
4

ANTONINE AND SEVERAN PERIODS, 2nd–3rd CENTURIES AD

1: Centurion of VII Praetorian Cohort, c.AD 150

2: Centurion from Philadelphia, Egypt; between AD 117 and 138

3: Centurion of Legio II Parthica, late 2nd-early 3rd century

THE ANARCHY OF THE 3rd CENTURY AD
1: *Centurio primus* ordo of Legio I Italica; Abrittus, June AD 251
2: Centurion hunting on horseback; Mediolanum, late 3rd century AD
3: *Centurio ordinarius* of Legio III Diocletiana; Thebes, late 3rd century AD
1
2
3

THE BATTLE FOR ITALY, EARLY 4th CENTURY AD
1: *Centurio ordinarius*, army of Constantine the Great
2: Aurelius Vitalis, Legio IV Flavia
3: Aurelius Processanus, VI Praetorian Cohort
4: Valerius Aulucentius, Legio XI Claudia

WESTERN & EASTERN EMPIRES, 4th–5th CENTURIES AD

1: *Centenarius* of a Legio Palatina; Rome, AD 350

2: *Centenarius* of Scholae Palatinae; Constantinople, AD 390

3: *Centenarius* of Western Roman infantry; Concordia Sagittaria, 5th century AD

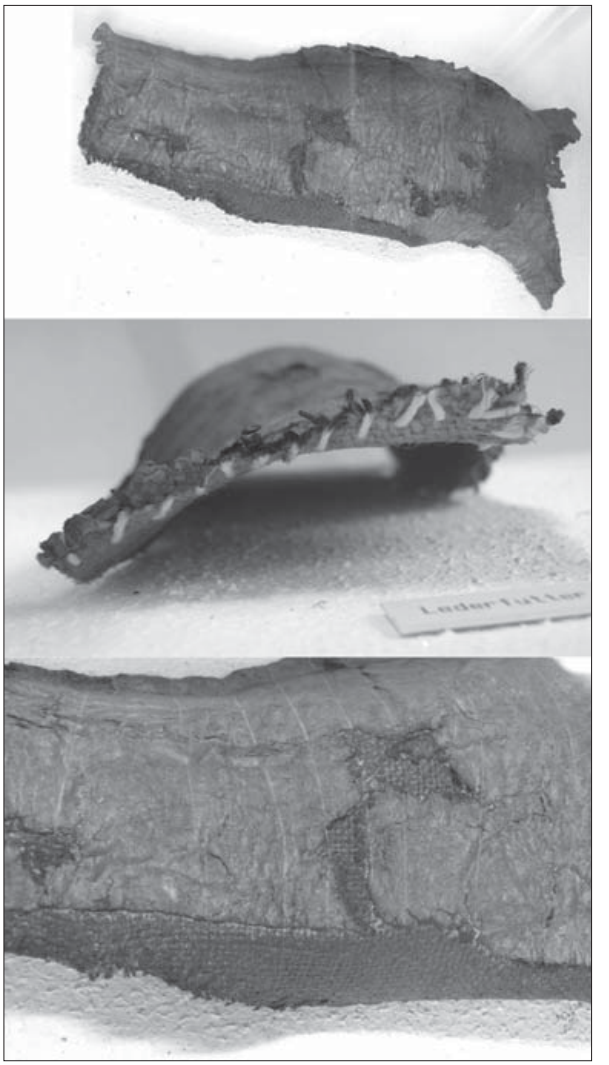
specimen of a pair of centurion's *ocreae* in silvered bronze are preserved in a private collection: they show on the knees embossed lion's heads, similar to those visible on the greaves of Sertorius and Marrucinus.

Weapons

The weapon of the centurion of the Augustan–Tiberian period is well illustrated on the Arc d'Orange; he brandishes a long cutting sword, similar to specimens from the Late Consular period, and still fitted with a bi-lenticular pommel. But a Mainz-type *gladius* already appears on fragments of a relief from Avignon, beside the greaves of a centurion; it seems be decorated with tufts on the guard and pommel (*capulus* – Suetonius, *Aug.*, XXVI). The Mainz type of sword is also clearly visible on the gravestone of Blattius from Este. On the monument to Favonius Facilis the weapon begins to suggest a transitional type of *gladius* between the Mainz and Pompeii typologies, like that of Nonienus Pudens from Strasbourg. Centurions' swords and scabbards were highly decorated with silver and bronze fittings and plates.

On centurions' gravestones the sword is invariably represented as worn on the left side of the body, and the dagger on the right, i.e. opposite to those of the ordinary *milites gregarii*. Practical reasons for an officer to wear the sword on the left have been suggested in a recent discussion with Dr Massimo Bizzarri: standing clear of the closed-up ranks of his men, the officer would perhaps benefit from a faster and easier way to draw his sword, which would also allow his men to see more easily orders signalled with his raised hand. The sword baldric (*balteus*) represented on the centurions portrayed in the Fayoum paintings are very often dyed in red or purple colour (*fucatus*), and fitted with silver and gilded bosses (*cingulum bullatum* – Varro, DLL, V, 116); many examples of the latter, representing Imperial heads, have been found in archaeological contexts.

The *pilum* and the *hasta* are also attested among the weapons of centurions by gravestones and figurative monuments of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.



Fragment of a greave, or possibly the lining to a greave, made of leather and linen. This exceptional specimen, dated to the 1st–3rd centuries AD and restored by Gansser-Burckhardt, is a so-far-unique example of a greave or lining made from organic materials. Note the presence of two layers, of linen and leather. (Photo courtesy Vindonissa Museum, Brugg, Switzerland)

THE LATER EMPIRE

Helmets

The *crista transversa* of the centurion disappears from the iconography at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. (Nevertheless, an isolated possible example in a centurion's panoply is visible on the Trophaeum Trajani monument erected by Constantine the Great in about AD 316.)

A very important specimen of late Roman helmet from the fortified camp at Intercisa in Hungary is furnished with a 'blade-like' front-to-

A *centenarius* of a Legio Palatina, AD 320–350, in a fresco in the Via Latina catacomb, Rome. See Plate H1 for a reconstruction. (*in situ*; photo courtesy Pontificia Accademia)

back metal crest. If silvered, this feature may have been a prerogative of junior officers, or even of *centenarii* or centurions; this would explain why Vegetius in the late 4th century AD still mentions the 'silvered' *crista* as a traditional distinction of the centurion.

Between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, centurions of the Praetorian Guard are represented on monuments with Pseudo-Attic helmets, sometimes with a crest fashioned like an eagle's beak at the front. High plumes characterized the helmets of infantry and cavalry *centenarii*. A high-plumed crest is visible on a late-style Roman helmet carved on the tombstone of Klaudius (? Flavius) Ingenuus, a *centenarius* in the Numerus Equitum Catafractariorum Seniorum, from Lyon. Although this is a cavalry officer's helmet, we may suppose that those of the infantry were very similar.

Shields

The continued use of the Imperial rectangular *scutum* by centurions of the early 3rd century AD is confirmed by the stele of a centurion with the

vitis (although with the *balteus* over his left shoulder ?), and a soldier with rectangular shield, *paenula* cloak and *caligae* sandals, now in the Istanbul Museum. The oval shields typical of the later 3rd and 4th centuries were also carried by infantry centurions and *centenarii*, as is visible in the Via Latina catacomb paintings. The *centenarius* of the Via Latina – Ipogeum of Dino Compagni – shows very clearly the leather rim of the shield and the central metallic boss. The late Western Roman legionaries in the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, which date from AD 432, show the use of large oval *scuta* – forerunners of the *skoutaria* of the Byzantine period – by both *milites legionarii* and officers.

Body armour

Modestus, author for the Emperor Tacitus in AD 275 of a small booklet on military terminology, uses the term *bellicosa lorica* for the war-armours and heavy body protection of the *centenarii* (*De Voc.*, 9). The name is also used by Vegetius (I, 20; II,15,16); and both Modestus (*De Voc.* 11,13,19) and Vegetius give to the *ordinarii* and *centuriones* fighting in the front line the *cataphracta* or *gravis lorica* (body armour) and greaves that covered the soldier from head to foot.

The many gravestones representing centurions of the 3rd and 4th centuries mainly show them clad in military dress – i.e. with *tunica militaris*, *sagum* or fringed *lacerna*, and *pileus* – but not in armour. One very interesting exception was that of Aurelius Vitalis from Eporedia (Ivrea), which represented this centurion of the Legio IIII (IV) Flavia in full armour on horseback. The stele is today lost, but a unknown Renaissance artist reproduced the figure with the arms and armour of his own age. Aurelius Vitalis was therefore probably completely armoured with a *cataphracta* and *ocreae*, thus supporting Vegetius. The fact that an infantry centurion was now depicted on horseback is also interesting.

The centurion's panoply on the Constantinian monument of Trophaeum Traiani shows a unique *squama* and elaborate greaves. Ringmail fitted with long sleeves, muscled armours, and lavishly painted armours in linen or leather, are all attested in artistic sources from the 4th–5th centuries AD.

Weapons

An early 3rd-century monument from Thessaloniki shows a soldier dressed in a *paenula*, and beside him a centurion with a vine-staff, both of them still wearing the sword on the right side of the body. Conversely, the gravestones of centurions of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD show evidence for the typical long *spatha* worn on the left side, as also by common soldiers of that period. The scabbard of the *centenarius* in the Via Latina catacomb painting is typical of swords of Gundremmingen typology, and the presence of *semispathae* beside longer examples is a characteristic of the officers in the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaics.

The use of missile weapons by late Roman centurions is clearly mentioned by Vegetius, and iconography confirms the employment of javelins and *hastae*. The unknown centurion from Milan is represented on his sarcophagus hunting with a javelin-like *verutum*, fitted with a pyramidal head, while the Via Latina officer carries two javelins in addition to his long *spatha*.

CLOTHING & DISTINCTIONS

Centurions of the early Principate wore tunics and cloaks substantially identical to those of the common soldiers, although the colours of these garments were indicative of the ranks. At least the *primi ordines* used a *candida vestis* (pure white tunic). The description left by Tacitus (*Hist.*, II, 89) of Vitellius's army entering Rome in AD 69 is clear: 'in front of the eagle marched the camp prefects, the tribunes and the centurions of the first rank, all dressed in pure white'. White is the tunic colour of the centurions portrayed in the encaustic paintings from Fayoum, and in the 19th century Hottenroth recorded the tunic on the monument to M. Caelius as being white.

The use of the military cloak (*sagum*, *sagulum*) is attested both in literary and figurative sources: e.g., the centurion Cornelius, addressing the Senate in the name of Augustus (Suet., *Aug.* XXV), wore a *sagulum* under which he hid the hilt of his sword. The *sagum* of centurions is represented as fitted with tassels (*tufae*) on many gravestones, e.g. those of Favonius Facilis and Sertorius Festus. Its colour seems often to have been a medium blue – at least, that is the colour copied by Hottenroth from Sertorius Festus's gravestone, and Fayoum portraits of officers, identified by the sword worn on the left side of the body, show blue cloaks.

Statuette of a centurion, late 2nd–early 3rd century AD. This piece, 23.5cm (9.2in) high, shows a clean-shaven centurion wearing a short sleeveless tunic, and a short *sagulum* cloak fastened at the right shoulder by a disk fibula – see Plate E3. Note the sword slung on his left, the *vitis* in his right hand and the scroll in his left. (Private collection; drawing by Giuseppe Rava)

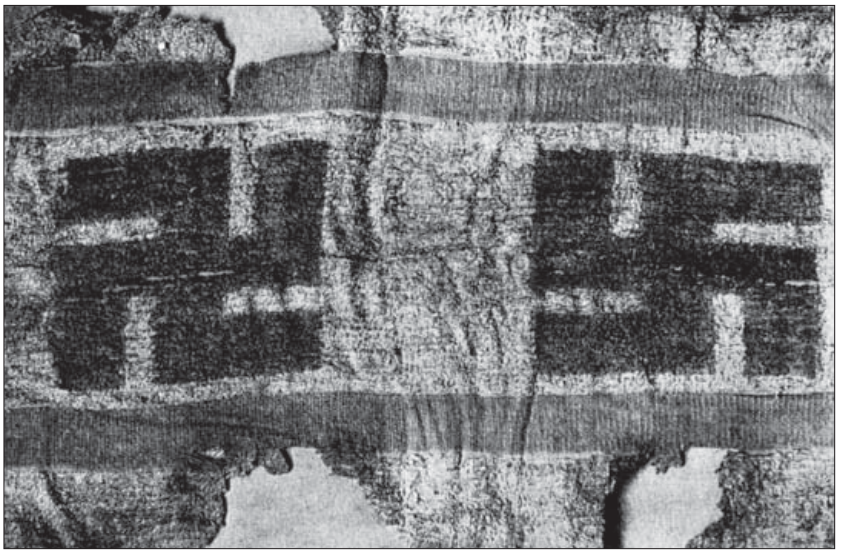
Gravestones of Late Empire date give us detailed representations of the clothing worn by centurions. Tunics with long, tight sleeves, close-fitting trousers, fringed *lacernae* or *sagula* cloaks are the rule from the end of the 2nd to the 4th centuries, and colours are suggested by the frescoes of Diocletian's period from the military shrine of the Luxor temple (though today these only survive in watercolour copies). The white tunics are widely decorated with purple stripes and patches – *clavi*, *segmenta*, *orbiculi*; the *anaxyrida* trousers are red-brown or ochre, while the cloaks are yellow or red-brown, decorated with wide circular *orbiculi*. (Interestingly, however, one centurion is dressed in a black tunic.)

The cloaks (*saga*, *chlamyda*) of late Roman centurions or *centenarii* were widely decorated with embroidery. Their lower edges were sometimes ornamented with fringes and wide purple borders, upon which were

Western Roman *centurio* or *centenarius*, *c.* AD 360, from the mosaic of the Great Hunt scene in the Villa del Tellaro at Noto, Sicily. This striking image of a centurion supervising soldiers hunting has recently emerged among the new restored mosaics of this magnificent villa, which probably belonged to someone of high military rank in the army of Julianus. Note the long staff with its swollen head; and also the hem of the *sagum*, decorated with a continuous pattern of the swastika motif (*crux gammata*, *tetragamma*) indicative of military rank. See also Plate H2. (Photo Dr Lamberto Rubini, courtesy Parco Archeologico della Villa del Tellaro)

applied images of swastikas (*tetragamma*, *crux gammata*), often alternating in direction. Cloaks are invariably fastened at the right shoulder by a 'crossbow'-shaped or circular brooch. Tight-fitting trousers are also visible in countless images of soldiers of all ranks, including a centurion in the Piazza Armerina mosaics.

Vegetius (*Epitom.*, I, 20) wrote that 'Until almost the present age the use of the Pannonian leather caps worn by our soldiers has been maintained, so that being constantly accustomed to having the head covered they might be less sensible of the weight of the helmet'. This 'pillbox' cap was also worn by centurions; on the Arch of Constantine it is visible upon the heads of two seated officers. Monaci identified the subjects on the arch as officers and soldiers of Legio V Macedonica or XIII Gemina, and of XV Apollinaris, from the associated standard-bearers carrying the *imagines* of Victoria and Sol Invictus (although it is likelier that the Victoria would represent Legio I Minervia). Although the seated officers are not clearly identified as centurions, a figure on a rare fragment of a sarcophagus representing Constantine's vision of the Cross wears the same uniform,



Fragment of a military cloak from Antinoë, Egypt, probably second half of 4th century AD. In 1902 the French archaeologist Albert Gayet discovered the grave of a Roman officer; the body was wrapped in narrow, interlaced yellow and red bandages, according with Egyptian custom of the Graeco-Roman period, and on the outer band a black ink inscription partly survived. This gave an illegible name, followed by a title indicating the rank of centurion, and the number of a legion. Over the body was a cloak, decorated on its lower edge with this repeated *crux gammata* pattern recalling the Villa del Tellaro mosaic. Among various grave-goods the most striking discovery was the metal upper shaft of a *vitis*, with a pommel in the form of a bronze bust of Bacchus – the god of grapes and wine, and thus associated with the vine. The dead man was a Christian, but pagan items were still buried with him, including small terracotta statues of Bès-Hercules, and Minerva armed with a sword. (ex-Gayet, 1903; photo author's collection)

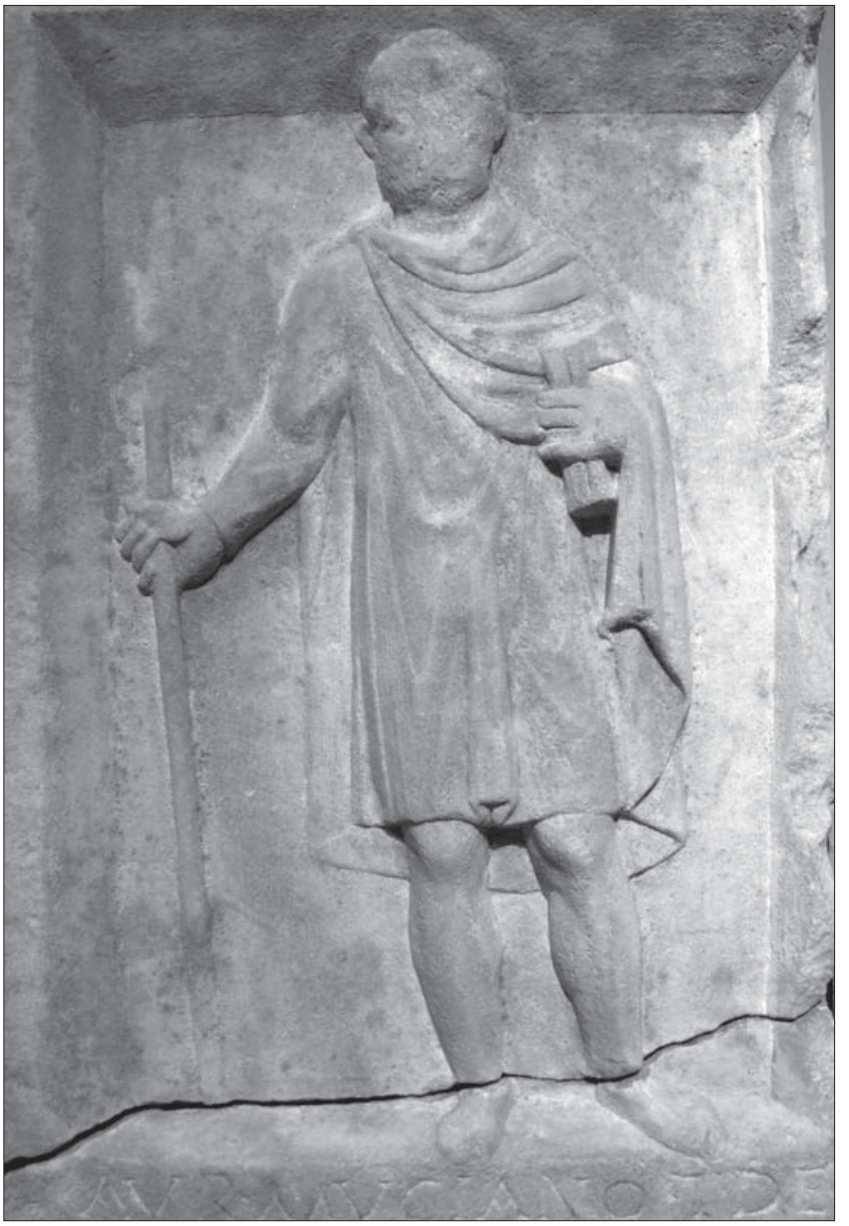
and can be identified as a centurion by his vine-staff. The same *pileus* cap is clearly worn by the centurion Flavius Augustalis from Aquileia, and by two centurions in the Piazza Armerina mosaics.

Ring-buckles on belts are visible on some 3rd-century centurions' funerary monuments, and disappeared slowly; they are still recognizable on many gravestones in the Balkans dating from the early 4th century and Constantine's reign.

Rank symbols and decorations

The *vitis*, the staff or cudgel of vine wood, was considered synonymous with the centurionate, and its importance is underlined by various authors. Thus Ovid: 'The good general commits the *vitis* to one to command one hundred' (*Ars Amatoria*, III, 527); and Juvenal (*Satires*, XIV, 193) recommends the schoolboy who is unequal to the study of the law to 'send in a petition for a centurion's vine-staff'. The centurion Sempronius Densus, who died defending the Emperor Galba sword in hand, is described thus: 'lifting up the staff with which centurions punish soldiers deserving of stripes, he cried out to the assailants and ordered them to spare the emperor' (Plut., *Galba*, XXVI). The importance of this rank symbol was maintained through the centuries; Eusebius (VII,15,2), writing about the martyrdom of the Christian centurion Marinos during the reign of either Valerian or Gallienus (rr. 253–268), stated that 'the vine-branch is a certain mark of honour among the Romans, and those who obtain it become, they say, centurions'.

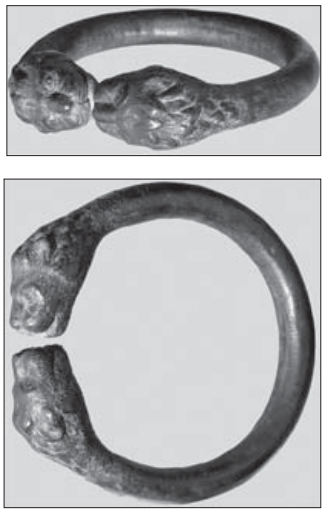
The *vitis* is attested on gravestones, monuments and mosaics from the 1st to the 4th century; for example, on the stelae of Favonius Facilis from Colchester, of Aurelius Mucianus, of a *centenarius* from Laskarevo, of a centurion and his wife from Augusta Raurica, in paintings in the military shrine at Luxor, and the mosaics at Tellaro and Piazza Armerina. Praetorians and Equites Singulares with the rank of centurion are always represented on their gravestones with the *vitis*. Its shape during the earlier Principate is usually that of a straight staff, slightly curved on the top. Later the staff acquired a mushroom-shaped head; confirmed in many artistic representations, this shape survived into the Byzantine period.



Grave stele of Aurelius Mucianus, a *centurio deputatus* of the early 3rd century AD, perhaps from Nicomedia or Rodosto-Perinthos. Note the clear depiction of the vine-staff. Personally responsible for the training and discipline of the legionaries under their command, centurions had a well-deserved reputation for dealing out harsh punishment. In his *Annals* (I, 23), Tacitus describes a mutiny during which mutineers 'killed a centurion, Lucilius, to whom, with soldier's humour, they had given the nickname Cedo Alteram ('Gimme Another') – because when he had broken one vine-stick across a soldier's back, he would call in a loud voice for another... and another.' (Istanbul Archaeological Museum; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

Histories of Christian military martyrs of the 3rd and 4th centuries mention, among others, the centurion Marcellus, who, after refusing to worship the imperial standards, flung away his vine-staff and sword belt. The military belt (*cingulum*, *balteus*) was a symbol of the armed soldier, and is invariably represented on the gravestones of centurions. According to Suetonius (*Aug.*, XXIV), centurions who dishonoured themselves in battle were deprived of their sword belts.

Centurions proudly displayed their military decorations and gifts (*dona militaria*) over their armour. Tacitus, describing Vitellius's triumphal entry into Rome, writes that 'the other centurions, with polished arms and decorations gleaming, marched each with his *centuria*. The common soldiers' medals and *torques* were likewise bright and shining'. The monument to M. Caelius, set up by his brother at Xanten in Lower



Roman *torques* decoration from Central Europe, 1st century AD. This lightweight metal ring, made from several forged and soldered segments, has terminals shaped like lions' heads; the diameter is 12.6cm (4.9in). Among the military distinctions for bravery awarded to soldiers up to and including the rank of centurion, these rings are always shown in pairs, clearly visible at the front of the shoulders – as on the Caelius monument, page 16. (Photo courtesy Hermann Historica International Auktion)

Germany, has a carving of him in full uniform holding his centurion's staff and displaying his decorations: *phalerae* (large medallions), *armillae* (arm bands), and *torques* (stylized neck rings), together with the *corona civica* on his head. Some of these are very similar to an original set of *dona militaria* found at Lauersfort, Germany. During the Empire some decorations became, in time, restricted to various ranks. Nobody below the rank of centurion could win the gold crowns, i.e. the *corona vallaris*, *corona muralis* and *corona aurea*; chief centurions could also receive the silver spearhead (*hasta pura*).

The military decorations were – as in the Late Consular age – displayed on the centurion's torso on a complex leather harness, and were also worn in battle. Many of them had been gained before the soldier was promoted from the ranks; for instance, the centurion Helvius Rufus Civica was still an ordinary *miles gregarius* when he saved a Roman's life during the campaigns against the Berbers led by Tacfarinas in AD 18. He was decorated by the Proconsul Apronius with the *torques* and *hasta pura*; the Emperor Tiberius added the civic crown – hence the soldier's extra name, Civica (Tacitus, *Ann.*, III, 21).

Centurions who were members of the equestrian or 'knightly' order had the right to wear its gold ring on their left hand (see MAA 470, page 23, photo of Lorarius stele). Septimius Severus extended this right to the *principales*, but in his time it was no longer reserved only to the equestrian order. In Roman society external signs of distinction had great importance, and the emperor's decision would have been greatly appreciated by soldiers for allowing them access to higher ranks.

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Gravestone of the centurion Q. Sertorius Festus, mid-1st century AD. Details of his nine phalerae are hardly discernible today, but can be partly reconstructed with the aid of a drawing made by the 19th-century Italian archaeologist dell'Orti Manara. The upper discs at left and right show eagle motifs, and between them is a *pelta* shield with five spreading vegetal designs. At centre is a *gorgoneion*; below this is a horse in right profile, flanked by two male faces – one of them bearded, and probably representing Neptune, tutelary god of the Legio XI Claudia. (Archaeological Museum, Verona; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

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A *phalera* from Vindonissa, with a blue glass centre portraying an emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty – probably Gaius Caligula (r. AD 37–41) or Claudius (r. AD 41–54). (Vindonissa Museum, Brugg, Switzerland; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

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BELOW LEFT **Chalcedony *phalera* representing a Bacchic figure, probably 3rd century AD. Small holes seem to be for horizontal and vertical attachment to the straps of a leather supporting harness. This specimen is 4.8cm (1.8in) high and 2.3cm (0.9in) thick. (Private collection, photo courtesy Dr Cesare Rusalen)**

BELOW **Another 3rd-century chalcedony *phalera*, this one representing a Eros figure. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; photo courtesy Dr Cesare Rusalen)**

PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: THE AUGUSTAN–TIBERIAN PERIOD, 1st CENTURY BC–1st CENTURY AD

A1: L. Blattius Vetus, Legio IIII (IV) Macedonica, end of 1st century BC

Blattius is reconstructed from his funerary stele from Fregole (Monselice). Centurions were sometimes armed with the same concave rectangular shield as their soldiers, here of curve-sided shape. He wears a transverse helmet crest of feather plumes; a scale cuirass complete with his harness of decorations; his *gladius* worn on his left side, greaves and vine-staff all attest to his rank. It is interesting that his gravestone shows the top of his *vitis* carved to the shape of the Egyptian lotus-flower motif; Blattius was in fact a veteran of Octavian's army at the battle of Actium, and apparently ornamented his staff of rank to recall that service.

A2: Centurion of Legio II Augusta, AD 21

This officer of Tiberius's reign (AD 14–37) is copied from the Arc d'Orange in southern France. His helmet has a front-to-back crest of horsehair. His ringmail *lorica gallica* bears a gorgon's-mask motif below the fastening hook for the *humeralia* shoulder-guards, which is similar to a specimen from Kalkriese – where German archaeologists have identified one of the dispersed sites of the Teutoburg Forest disaster. He is armed with a *gladius* copied from one found in the River Saone. Note the capricorn shield *deigmaton* of Legio II Augusta, as visible on the Arc d'Orange; the shape of the shield is the same as in A1.

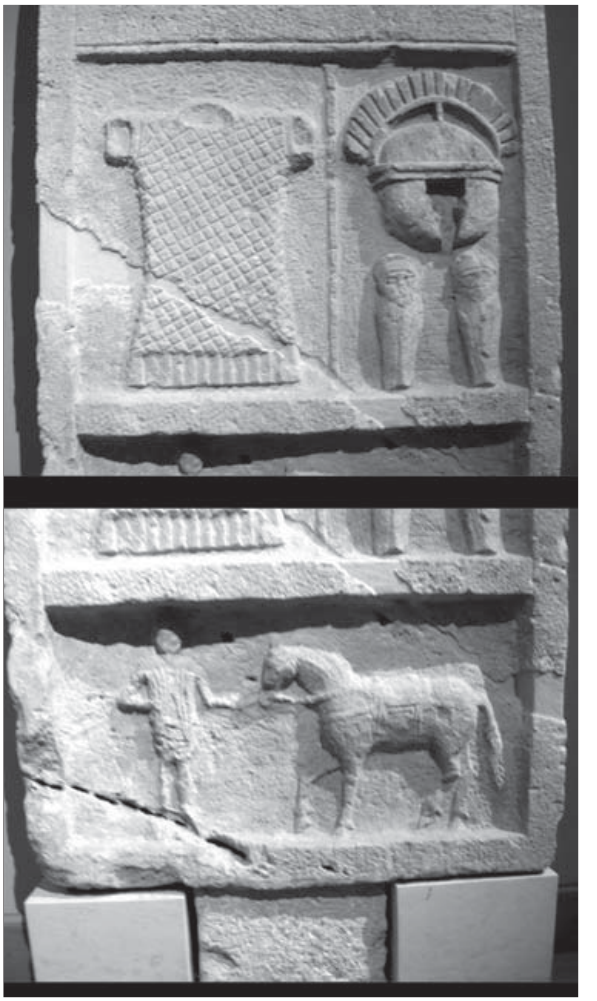
A3: M. Caelius, senior centurion of Legio XIIX (XVIII), AD 9

Marcus (or Manlius) Caelius, who died in the Varus campaign, is reconstructed from his monument found near the legionary base at Xanten, Holland, and from military fittings found on the battlefield location at Kalkriese. The splendour – and therefore the expense – of the monument raised by this officer's brother strongly suggests that he was, if not the *primus pilus*, then certainly one of the *primi ordines* of the First Cohort, although the damaged inscription does not absolutely confirm this. On his wrists, and on his leather *lorica* with attached leather *pteryges*, he displays his full set of decorations: *armillae*, *torques*, and *phalerae*. Note also the *corona civica*, which bore the Latin inscription '*ob civem servatum*'. The blue cloak follows Hottenroth's copy of the Sertorius Festus monument (see B1), and darker blue cloaks are also shown on 2nd-century encaustic portraits, believed to depict centurions, from Fayoum in Egypt.

B: THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN DYNASTY, AD 14–64

B1: Q. Sertorius Festus, Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis

Another much-decorated *centurio* reconstructed mainly from his gravestone, which shows his *dona militaria* fastened to a leather harness worn over his *squama plumata*, and the *corona civica* on his head. The scales of the armour are copied from specimens found at Hod Hill, Dorset; identical to those represented on the gravestone, they are strengthened by a raised median rib. Note the fastening of the cuirass on the left side, after a suggestion by H. Russell Robinson. The colours of this reconstruction are based upon the 19th-century drawing by Hottenroth, made when traces of colour were still visible on the monument.



Panoply on the tombstone of T. Calidius, a centurion of Legio XV Apollinaris, 1st–2nd centuries AD (see Plate B2). Note the armour, probably a *centone* made of padded, quilted fabric. The helmet seems to be of Weisenau typology, and has a transverse crest of separated elements – feathers? The greaves are embossed at the knee with human head motifs of typical Celtic pattern. (Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna; photo courtesy Dr Cesare Rusalen)

B2: Titus Calidius Severus, Legio XV Apollinaris

The helmet is based upon the panoply shown on his grave stele, and the specimen from Sisak in the Balkans that shows multi-layered silvering and a fitting for a transverse crest. The armour is usually interpreted as a *squama* or scale cuirass, but the author believes it more probably represents a padded armour (*centone*) made of organic materials – multi-layered felt and wool – worn over a second organic *subarmalis*. Note the human-mask knee decorations on his greaves, and the highly decorated elements of his horse harness, also copied from his gravestone. The colours are based upon those once visible on the stele of Silius Attonis of the cavalry unit Ala Picentiana.

B3: Marcus Petronius Classicus Marrucinus, Legio VIII Augusta

The funerary monument to this Bruttian *centurio*, from Poetovium, shows the best example of a *crista transversa* visible on Early Empire gravestones of centurions; it seems to be mounted with goose feathers. The gravestone also shows that the helmet, of Weisenau typology, was fitted with cheek-guards furnished with metal ears, as on the contemporary helmets of Weiler type. The linen and leather body armour (*corium*), fitted with painted *humeralia* and 'belt', has been reconstructed from a similar specimen from Gardun (Tilurium); imitating Greek models, it is comparable with that shown on the Colchester stele of the centurion Facilis. Its colour is copied from a painting from the House of the Vettii at Pompeii. Note that his *phalerae* have coloured glass centres, like a contemporary specimen from Vindonissa in Switzerland (see page 42).

C: THE FLAVIAN DYNASTY, AD 69–96: INVESTITURE OF A CENTURION

This scene reconstructs an *ordinatio* ceremony of *c.* AD 78, during which a centurion is presented with his *latia vitis* and *codicillus*. Standard-bearers and trumpeters stand behind the foreground figures on the dais in the courtyard of a legionary fortress, surrounded by parading troops.

C1: *Tribunus legionis*

The officer is clad in his most splendid armour and accoutrements. Note the Pseudo-Corinthian helmet, from the specimen found at Autun; his silvered and lavishly decorated metal *lorica*, with a gilded *gorgoneion* breast ornament; his *parazonium* sword, and the scarlet sash (*zona militaris*) tied on the breast with the 'Hercules knot', a symbol of high authority. His decorative boots are *cothurni*, with leonine flaps.

C2: *Centurio*

This officer is based upon a gravestone in Porta Borsari, Verona. The 'muscled' metal *stadios* was one of the various armours used by centurions, and is worn here over a linen *subarmalis* with decorative white and red *pteryges*. Note the rear of his greaves, and of the torso harness bearing his decorations. He has his sword and dagger slung on a *balteus* and a *cingulum*, and carries a *pilum* javelin. He is receiving his *vitis* from the tribune.

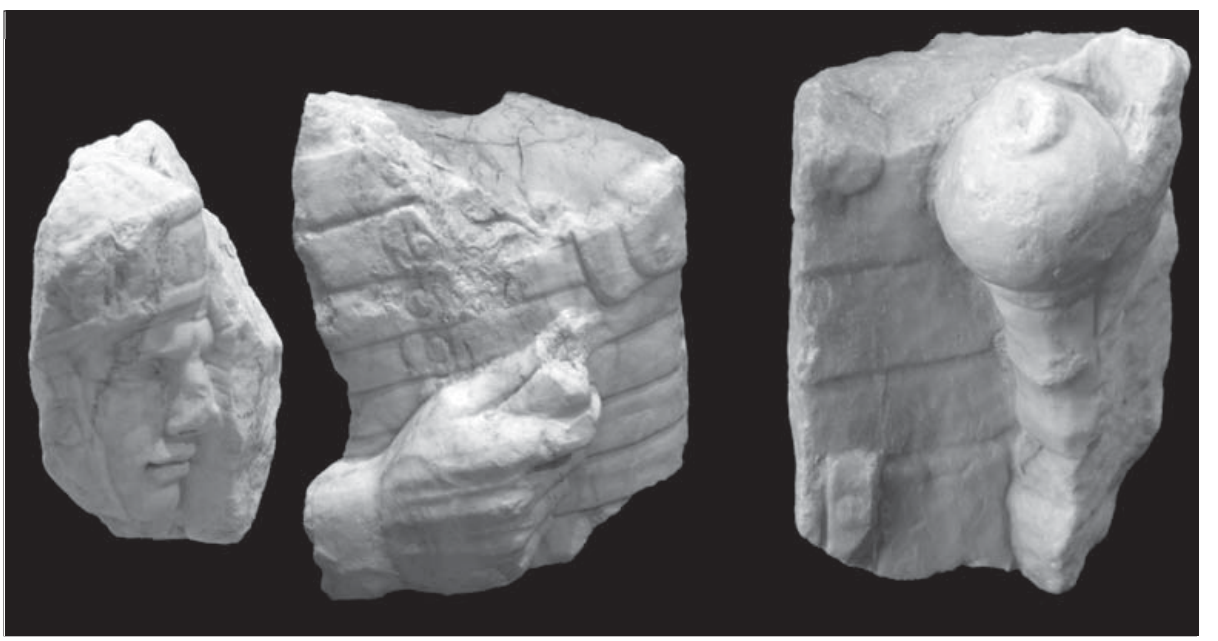
C3: *Imaginarius*

The image-bearer of the legion (Veg., *Ep*. II, VII), who ranked as a *principalis*, is based here on the funerary monument of Genialis. His decorated helmet is fitted with a facial mask; to show this, we have here thrown back over his shoulders the pelt of a bear's head and front paws that was normally worn over the helmet. His armour is a *corium*, a semi-rigid leather corselet with large shoulder defences; it is reconstructed from the fragments of leather armour found at Vindonissa. The imperial *imago* in silver and gilt is from an original in the Museo Nazionale in Naples.

C4: *Cornicen*

The hornist is copied from Trajan's Column. His helmet, too, is covered with an animal skin. He wears ringmail armour, which allowed taking a deeper breath when sounding horn calls; the round *clipeus* shield slung from his shoulder was less encumbering than the legionary's *scutum*.

Fragments of sculpture from the Templum Gentis Flaviae, *c.* AD 95, and probably representing a centurion. This may be the only clear representation of a centurion – perhaps of the Emperor Domitian's Praetorian Guard, or of a Flavian legion – clad in a *lorica segmentata* (see Plate D4). He wears an Attic helmet with a richly embossed frontal diadem, and a cuirass of the Corbridge type. Note the sword worn on the left side of the body, and the right hand gripping a staff – with the decorated helmet, these are persuasive indications of the rank of *centurio*. (Museo Nazionale Romano, courtesy Dr Marina Mattei)



D: TRAJAN'S FIRST DACIAN CAMPAIGN, AD 101–102

D1: Emperor Trajan in full armour

The emperor (r. AD 98–117) wears a metal 'muscled' *lorica*, silvered, painted, and with gilt bronze appliqués, of a quality suitable for the divine and heroic figure of the *optimus princeps*. The armour is worn over a *subarmalis* with four levels of *pteryges*. The reconstruction is taken from the Adamklissi Monument and Trajan's Column; note the emperor's employment of military *caligae* sandals, and the plain military *sagum* cloak instead of the officer's *paludamentum*.

D2 & D3: *Primi ordines*, battle order

The senior centurion holding the emperor's sword and helmet (**2**) is based upon Metopa X of the Adamklissi Monument; note his crotch-length ringmail armour, worn over a *thorax laneus* and a padded *subarmalis*. The centurion at left (**3**) is based upon Trajan's Column; he is protected by a short leather 'muscled' cuirass of Greek typology, like that of the centurion from Liebnitz. Both these officers are wearing military cloaks and calf-length *feminalia* trousers.

D4: *Centurio ordinarius* of Legio IIII (IV) Flavia Felix

In a vignette typical of the savagery of the Dacian Wars, as confirmed by the monuments, a legionary centurion hot from battle offers his emperor severed Dacian heads. We base his appearance on the intriguing fragmentary carvings from the Templum Gentis Flaviae (see photos on page 45). His helmet is of Attic style, with a decorated 'diadem' plate above the brow, and he wears – uniquely, in the evidence discovered so far – the same *lorica segmentata* or *ferrea* as the legionaries depicted on Trajan's Column, here of Corbridge style. Note the *balteoli* protecting the genitals, and the *cingulum* with silvered plates and buckles, copied from the specimens found at Tekjie.

E: THE ANTONINE AND SEVERAN PERIODS, 2nd–3rd CENTURIES AD

E1: Centurion of VII Praetorian Cohort, *c.* AD 150

The simple but magnificent equipment of this Praetorian Guard officer is taken from the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161). It comprises an Attic-style helmet with rich decoration and a high ostrich-plume crest; a leather 'muscled' cuirass; and the Praetorian Guard pattern of oval shield decorated with volutes.

Roman centurion of the early 4th century AD, in a detail of the mosaic from Villa del Casale, Piazza Armerina (compare with Plate G1). His staff of rank has a very pronounced head, and his tight-fitting, long-sleeved tunic is decorated with the typical woven-in bands and patches of the period – *clavi*, *segmenta*, and *orbiculi*. There is some evidence that these decorations were sometimes removed from worn-out garments and appliquéd to new ones. Detail photos of a number of recovered examples will be found in MAA 425, *Roman Military Clothing (3): AD 400–640.* (Author's collection)

E2: Centurion from Philadelphia, Egypt; between AD 117 and 138

Based upon an encaustic wax portrait from Fayoum. The pure white tunic, decorated with vertical *clavi*, is worn together with a blue *sagum* – apparently, the typical colours of centurions' uniform, as suggested not only by the Fayoum portraits but also by then-surviving traces of colour on European monuments copied in the 19th century by Hottenroth. On the 2nd-century Fayoum portraits the baldric is often dyed red-purple (*fucatus*), pink-red, or dark blue, and decorated with alternating silver and gold bosses. Its position over the right shoulder, indicating that the sword was slung on the man's left side, is at this date confirmation that the portrait depicts an officer.

E3: Centurion of Legio II Parthica, late 2nd-early 3rd century

This officer of the new legion raised by the Emperor Septimius Severus is taken from a statuette probably from Rome, and today in a private collection. Note the mid-length *semispatha* sword, copied from the Lauriacum specimen, worn slung from a broad baldric decorated with pierced bronze fittings; and the long rank staff, which now begins to have a mushroom-shaped head. The sleeveless tunic is a silk *paragauda*, decorated with *clavi* in purple-pink, and the brown woollen *anaxyrides* are fitted to the legs. Woollen *udones* (socks) knitted in bright colours are visible above the nailed *calcei*, which are from specimens found at Dura Europos.

F: THE ANARCHY OF THE 3rd CENTURY AD

F1: *Centurio primus ordo* of Legio I Italica; Abrittus, June AD 251

This reconstruction uses descriptions by Modestus and Vegetius, together with military finds by Bulgarian archaeologists on the battlefield of Abrittus, and carvings on the retrospective Trophaeum Traiani monument of AD 316. The helmet, of Heddernheim typology – see Robinson's so-called 'Auxiliary Cavalry Type E' – has been fitted with a transverse crest. The scale armour is supplemented by shoulder pieces, and is worn over a thick, multi-layered *subarmalis* coloured red (*cum purpura maura* – SHA, *Claud*., 14, 8). The shield blazon is speculatively copied from that shown for Legio I Italica in the early 5th-century *Notitia Dignitatum*.

F2: Centurion hunting on horseback; Mediolanum, late 3rd century AD

The centurion who figures in the carvings on the Milan sarcophagus is represented hunting from horseback, with a javelin of *verutum* type. Note his *tunica*, decorated with *clavi*, *segmenta* and *orbiculi*; the fringed *lacerna* cloak, the *anaxyrides* and the closed *calcei*. The colours of his horse harness are based upon the Piazza Armerina mosaics.

F3: *Centurio ordinarius* of Legio III Diocletiana; Thebes, late 3rd century AD

This centurion is represented as if offering a votive sacrifice to the gods. His garment colours are copied from those of the centurions painted on the walls of the Luxor military shrine, dating from Diocletian's reign (AD 284–305). Note that his leather armour is made of crocodile-hide scales, of which specimens of at least three different types have survived from Roman Egypt. Later writers of military treatises associated the colour of the helmet crest with that of the main field of the shield.

G: THE BATTLE FOR ITALY, EARLY 4th CENTURY AD

This plate imagines an episode in AD 312 during the civil war between Constantine and Maxentius, when a parley was arranged between centurions of the opposing sides.

G1: *Centurio ordinarius*, army of Constantine the Great

From the mosaics at the Villa del Casale, Piazza Armerina. This officer wears the *pileus pannonicus* typical of Late Roman soldiers, a tunic richly decorated with woven or embroidered work, tight *anaxyrida* and black *campagi* thonged shoes; he carries the usual centurion's staff with a mushroom-shaped head.

G2: Aurelius Vitalis, *centurio* of Legio IIII (IV) Flavia

This Constantinian officer has been tentatively reconstructed by analogy with his stele – which was lost after being redrawn in anachronistic armour during the 16th century – and by comparison with a statuette of a fully armoured cavalryman from Trecenta. His Pseudo-Attic helmet is based on one recently found at Vetren (Tegulicium), and he is completely protected by a plate armour (*cataphracta*) and greaves. He is armed with both *hasta* and *spatha*. Note his horse harness, of heavy weather-proofed fabric.

G3: Aurelius Processanus, *centurio* of VI Praetorian Cohort

This heavily armoured Praetorian officer is reconstructed following the images of Praetorians on the Arch of Constantine, with colours from the Piazza Armerina mosaics. The helmet bears some resemblance to the find from the River Wensum, Norfolk, which Robinson classified as a 3rd-century 'Cavalry Sports Type H'. Note the Maxentian Praetorian *vexillum* in the background.

G4: Valerius Aulucentius, *centurio* of Legio XI Claudia

Again, this officer is reconstructed from his funerary stele. Under the heavily fringed cloak his tunic is a good deal plainer than that of G1, but he too carries the *vitis* to mark his rank.

H: WESTERN & EASTERN EMPIRES, 4th–5th CENTURIES AD

H1: *Centenarius* of a Legio Palatina; Rome, AD 350

This officer is copied from the catacomb painting in the Via Latina. The helmet, fitted with a silvered metallic crest and a bronze appliqué showing the Christian *chrismon*, is from a piece once in the collection of Axel Guttman. Note the lined and fringed mantle; the long-sleeved mail shirt, based on the specimen from South Shields, England; and the old-fashioned *spatha* with the scabbard chape of Gundremmingen type. Inside the shield, we follow Vegetius in showing short, weighted throwing darts (*plumbatae*); the officer also carries two weighted javelins, the colours of their painted shafts copied from the medieval miniatures in the *Anonymus de Rebus Bellicis*.

H2: *Centenarius* of Scholae Palatinae; Constantinople, AD 390

A *centenarius* of the Palatine Guards was charged by the Emperor Theodosius I with the transport from Alexandria to the new capital of an Egyptian obelisk of the Pharaoh Thutmosis III, once in Karnak. When it was installed in the Hippodrome, its base was carved with an image of the officer performing his duty. The 'pageboy bob' hairstyle is typical of the Germanic bodyguards of the period, as is the tunic decorated with *orbiculi*, *clavi*, *segmenta* and *tabulae*; the pure white tunic (*candida tunica*) was now reserved to the Scholae Palatinae. His *sagum* is ornamented with swastikas, from the original specimen found in a probable centurion's grave at Antinoë, Egypt – as was the metal part of his staff, surmounted by a bronze image of Bacchus.

H3: *Centenarius* of Western Roman infantry; Concordia Sagittaria, 5th century AD

This officer is based upon the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, one of the best sources for reconstructions of the late Western Roman armies. The Attic-style helmet is reconstructed from the mosaics and a specimen found at Richborough, England; its silvered crest is surmounted by multicoloured feathers. Note the painted cuirass of leather and linen, its bronze fittings taken from finds at Concordia Sagittaria near the Adriatic coast of NE Italy; it is worn over a padded *thoracomacus*. The *semispatha* and the long *spatha* are decorated in 5th-century cloisonné style, and are of Byzantine production. Note the combined use of *campagi raeticulati* and *udones* as protection for the feet.

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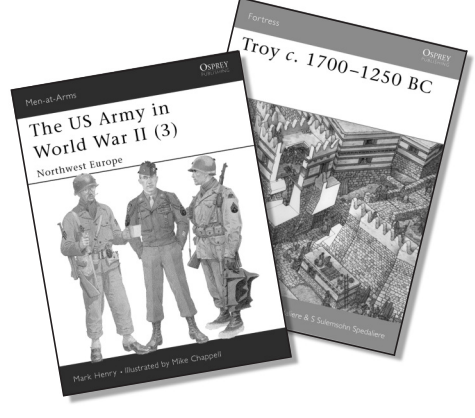

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First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Osprey Publishing,
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 0PH, UK
44-02 23rd Street, Suite 219, Long Island City, NY 11101, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
Print ISBN: 978 1 84908 795 7
PDF ebook ISBN: 978 1 84908 796 4
ePub ebook ISBN: 978 1 78096 039 5

Editor: Martin Windrow
Page layout by: Melissa Orrom Swan, Oxford
Index by Alan Thatcher
Typeset in Helvetica Neue and ITC New Baskerville
Originated by PDQ Media, Bungay, UK
Printed in China through Worldprint Ltd.
12 13 14 15 16 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedication

To the great friends who share with me every day
my passion for the ancient world: Andrea Salimbeti,
Luca Ferrando, Massimo Bizzarri and Vito Silvestro

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the following friends, colleagues and institutions for their generous help during the preparation of this book, though lack of space prevents me from detailing their individual contributions:
Prof Livio Zerbini, Laboratory of the Danubian Provinces, University of Ferrara; Dr Marina Mattei, former Director, Musei Capitolini; Dr Mojca Vomer Gojkovic, Provincial Museum, Ptuj, Slovenia; Dr Ashraf Nageh, Coptic Museum, Cairo, Egypt; Prof Ivan Radman-Livaja & Dr Ante Rendic-Miocevic, Archaeological Museum, Zagreb; Jacopo De Vecchi & Mons Erminio De Scalzi, Church of St Ambrogio, Milan; Cesare Rusalen, Legio I Italica re-enactment association & website Roma-Victrix.com; Hermann Historica oHG, Munich, Germany; Dr Elodia Bianchin, Museo Nazionale Atestino; Museo Archeologico,Verona; Museo Civita Romana, Rome; Museo Archeologico, Turin; Musei Vaticani, & Dr Barbara Mazzei, Pontificia Accademia, Vatican City; Musée Calvet, Avignon, France; Adamklissi Museum, Romania; British Museum, London; Vindonissa Museum, Brugg, Switzerland; Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Turkey; Dr Lamberto Rubini; Dr Stefano Izzo; Dr Nic Fields; Dr Andrea Salimbeti; Dr Massimo Bizzarri; and finally, a special acknowledgement to Giuseppe Rava, for his passionate interpretation of my instructions for the colour plates, and r the illustration on page 36.
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Source abbreviations used in this text, additional to sources in Bibliography:

AE *Année épigraphique*
CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
JRMES *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* (UK)
PL *Patrologia Latina*

Glossary of Latin terms used in this text

cataphractus: armoured soldier
centuria: unit commanded by a centurion, 80–100 men
cohors: cohort – one-tenth of a legion, a unit of *c.* 500 men; or a separate, non-legionary unit of either *c.* 500 or *c.* 1,000 men
evocatus, pl. evocati: re-enlisted soldier with superior status and special duties
frumentarius: legionary soldier detached to serve in intelligence or police role
hastatus: a centurion in the First Cohort, third-ranking in the legion
hastatus posterior: a centurion in the First Cohort, fifth-ranking in the legion; also, most junior of the six centurions in other cohorts
imago: standard bearing the emperor's image
legatus: commander of a legion, and provincial governor
legio, pl. legiones: the main Roman army formation, composed (pre-4th cent AD) of between 4,000 and 6,000 men
optio, pl. optiones: a centurion's second-in-command
pilus prior: the senior centurion, and commander, of the Second to Tenth Cohorts of a legion
praefectus castrorum: camp commander – third-ranking officer within a legion
praefectus praetorio: commander of the Praetorian Guard
praefectus urbanus: commander of the Urban Cohorts in Rome
praefectus vigilum: commander of the *Vigiles* – a police appointment in Rome
primi ordines: the centurions of the First Cohort of a legion
primus pilus: 'first javelin' – the senior centurion of a legion, commanding the First Cohort; pl. *primipilares*, high-status class of serving and former holders of that appointment
princeps: the second-ranking centurion in the legion, a centurion in the First Cohort
princeps posterior: the fourth-ranking centurion in the legion, a centurion in the First Cohort; also, the junior of the two centurions of the *centuriae* of *principes* within the other cohorts
princeps prior: the senior of the two centurions of the *centuriae* of *principes* within each cohort
principalis, pl. principales: promoted soldier below the rank of centurion – 'NCO'
principia: headquarters tent/ building in a military camp/ fort
tribuni: senior officers subordinate to the legion commander
vitis (latia v.): vine-staff – the symbol of centurion's rank